



April 28, 2015

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The Honorable Harold W. "Trey" Gowdy III, Chairman
Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Gowdy and Ranking Member Lofgren:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 200 national civil rights organizations, we write to express our profound disappointment in the Subcommittee for providing a forum to unnecessary and dangerous attacks on the 14th Amendment. While tomorrow's hearing is not about any particular legislation, it appears aimed at building support for legislation that would repeal the Citizenship Clause, one of the cornerstones of our nation's civil and human rights protections.

Eliminating the Citizenship Clause of the 14th Amendment would create two tiers of American society – a modern-day caste system – with potentially millions of natural-born Americans being treated as somehow less than entitled to the equal protection of the laws that our nation has struggled so hard to guarantee. The stated purpose of such an insidious proposal is to deter unauthorized immigration, but its effect would be to make existing problems with our immigration system even worse – and, as if that were not enough, would essentially punish babies for the actions of their parents.

For years, our coalition has urged Congress to repair our broken immigration system. We are astonished that instead of taking up bipartisan legislation that could pass both chambers of Congress and improve the lives of millions of immigrants and citizens alike, the Subcommittee is instead turning its attention to a relative handful of "birth tourists" and even providing a mouthpiece for wild-eyed conspiracy theories that have been floated about "terror babies."

The Constitution's Citizenship Clause was adopted to prevent exactly the sort of thing that is being contemplated in this hearing. The language of the 14th Amendment was meant to forever settle the question of what makes someone a U.S. citizen and a citizen of each state, making clear that there can never again be an underclass of Americans living among us.

As Justice John Marshall Harlan said in 1896, in what was a dissent from the infamous decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, but which later became accepted as obvious, our Constitution "neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens." We urge you to keep those words in mind during this upcoming hearing.

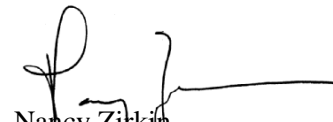


Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you have any questions, please contact Rob Randhava, Senior Counsel at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, at (202) 466-3311.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin
Executive Vice President