



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

On

“Birthright Citizenship: Is it the Right Policy for America?”

**The House Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security**

April 29, 2015

By Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

As Congress continues to debate changes to our immigration laws, some federal lawmakers have repeatedly contemplated the repeal of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which grants U.S. citizenship to all children born in the United States.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS)¹, the national organization established by Lutheran churches in the United States to serve uprooted people, believes that denying U.S. citizenship to children runs counter to our biblical mandate to care for sojourners in our midst by preserving their dignity and defending our system of justice for all. Further, it is an extremely misguided and unwarranted proposal that would undermine American values of equality, unnecessarily hurt children and families, and fail to remedy our broken immigration system.

Inconsistent with Biblical Mandates

Denying U.S. citizenship to children born in the United States contradicts biblical mandates to love and treat justly sojourners in our midst.

¹ Founded in 1939, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service is the second largest refugee resettlement agency in the United States. It is nationally recognized for its leadership advocating with refugees, asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, immigrants in detention, families fractured by migration and other vulnerable populations. Through more than 75 years of service and advocacy, LIRS has helped over 500,000 migrants and refugees rebuild their lives in America.

“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself...” (Leviticus 19:33–34, ESV).

Scripture affirms the dignity of all people as made in the image of God, deserving of justice and called to care for each other as neighbors. Repeatedly, Scripture calls the community of faith to care for and prevent injustice to the widow, the fatherless, and the foreigner (Deuteronomy 24:14-15, 17; Ps 146:9, ESV), showing God’s heart for people at the margins, people vulnerable to exploitation.

Undermining American Values

After the Civil War, the U.S. Congress passed the 14th Amendment, affirming that U.S. citizenship could not be denied to individuals based on race, nationality or family history.

Repealing birthright citizenship would undermine fundamental American values of equality. The current law serves as a simple and efficient way to ensure equal rights and protections to all children born in the United States.

Harmful to Migrant Children and Families

If the 14th Amendment were to be curtailed or repealed, some newborn babies could obtain the nationality of their parents, yet for many others this may not be possible. As a result, many children would grow up in the United States without a nationality, subjecting more families to the threats of separation and instability. We oppose any laws or policies that create yet another marginalized and vulnerable population within our borders.

Misguided Proposal That Would Not Fix the Broken Immigration System

Repealing birthright citizenship would result in a larger undocumented population and would force more children to grow up in the shadows with fewer protections and limited access to basic services. We encourage Congress to dismiss this harmful proposal and instead work towards a solution that unites families, upholds justice, and welcomes migrants and refugees.