

March 20, 2007

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House of Representatives
2371 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madam Speaker:

With the House of Representatives preparing to consider legislation to address the complex problems of undocumented migration to the United States and legalization for the 12 million undocumented immigrants already here, we write to support your efforts to pass a comprehensive immigration reform bill this year that is workable and fair.

As leaders of Jewish community organizations, we look both to the teachings of our Jewish religious and ethical tradition, and to core American values relating to immigrants, for guidance on immigration reform. With 36 references in the Torah mandating that we not only welcome, but love the stranger, we call on Congress to show leadership by providing an effective legal immigration system that is characterized by rule of law, national interest and compassion. Comprehensive reform of our broken immigration system is critical to this nation's security, economic and humanitarian interests. We urge Congress to pass legislation this year so that families can be reunited and we can restore the rule of law at the border and in the workplace once and for all.

We also call on Congress to ensure that any bill aiming to reform our immigration system preserves the United States' longstanding commitment to provide safe haven to those fleeing persecution. The United States has long been a leader in the protection of refugees at home and abroad. Yet in the past decade we have noticed a discouraging trend in legislation and regulations, making our laws more difficult to navigate by victims of persecution who are most often empty-handed, traumatized, and separated from their loved ones. While we support the government's right to ensure that the asylum system is not abused, this goal must be achieved without further traumatizing victims of religious and other persecution, and putting them at risk of wrongful return to those who mean them harm.

A comprehensive approach to immigration reform must recognize and respond to the reality that approximately 12 million undocumented individuals currently reside in the United States; that unrealistic immigration laws and ineffective border enforcement policies have created conditions that have resulted in thousands of deaths and increasing violence in the border regions; and that extensive backlogs for family immigration visas have led to prolonged and inhumane separation of families. Furthermore, the failure to reform our immigration laws perpetuates an illegal immigration system and undermines government efforts to target enforcement resources on criminals and terrorists who pose grave dangers to the country. Continuation of the status quo is not only unwise, but also unacceptable.

Any final comprehensive immigration reform legislation must include provisions that provide:

- Border protection policies that are consistent with American humanitarian values, protect legitimate asylum-seekers, and are effective against illegal migration, allowing authorities to successfully protect the integrity of our borders and prevent the entry of those who would do us harm;
- Opportunities for hard-working immigrants who are already contributing to this country to come out of the shadows, regularize their status upon satisfaction of reasonable criteria and, over time, pursue an option to become lawful permanent residents and eventually United States citizens;

- Reforms in our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting times for separated families, who currently must wait many years, to be reunited with loved ones;
- Wider legal avenues that correspond with the needs of American employers, through which workers and their families can enter our country and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights fully protected; and
- Programs to enhance citizenship and encourage the integration of newcomers into American society.

As the debate progresses, we strongly believe that the tone of the immigration reform debate is as important as the legislation and policy it produces. We encourage Congress to engage in reasonable discourse characterized by civility and respect that is mindful of the very people affected by this legislation. A recent report by the Anti-Defamation League reminds us that there is a direct connection between the national policy debate and the atmosphere surrounding the daily lives of immigrants, showing that extremist groups are seeking to exploit national divisions and spread a message of xenophobia, promote hateful stereotypes, and incite bigotry and violence against Hispanics, regardless of their immigration status. The tenor and outcome of our national debate over the fate of undocumented persons in the United States will speak volumes about where we are heading as a society, and Members of Congress should seek opportunities to speak out against bigotry, intolerance, and prejudice in our society, wherever they occur.

We firmly believe that with your leadership, Congress can ensure that our country's immigration laws are reformed in a comprehensive manner that will make the United States stronger and safer while honoring our tradition as a nation of immigrants.

Respectfully,

National Organizations

David Harris Executive Director American Jewish Committee	Gideon Aronoff President and CEO Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
Neil B. Goldstein Executive Director American Jewish Congress	Genie Cohen Executive Director International Association of Jewish Vocational Services
Abraham H. Foxman National Director Anti-Defamation League	Rabbi Steve Gutow Executive Director Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Daniel S. Mariaschin Executive Vice President B'nai B'rith International	Simon Greer President and CEO Jewish Funds for Justice
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CC:

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