



Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

*The Religious Action Center
pursues social justice
and religious liberty
by mobilizing the American
Jewish community and
serving as its advocate
in the nation's capital.*

March 23, 2010

Dear Member of Congress,

On behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism whose more than 900 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, we urge you to pass comprehensive immigration reform this year. Our current immigration system is characterized by policies that fail to meet the needs of businesses or workers and that result in families being separated for decades at a time. Comprehensive immigration reform can remedy these and other ills and make our nation safer and more prosperous while reflecting our status as a nation founded and strengthened by immigrants.

Comprehensive immigration reform must address the chronic backlog in visa distribution, resulting in family members being separated for years. While "immediate relatives" face the shortest wait for visas, those in lower preference categories are plagued by delays that can exceed twenty years. The crushing waiting times for family reunification can and should be reduced.

Comprehensive immigration reform must protect businesses and workers. The approximately twelve million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. (who comprise more than five percent of our nation's workforce) are frequently targeted by unscrupulous employers. Fearful of deportation, these individuals are often reluctant to report unethical labor practices, resulting in poorer conditions for all workers. Comprehensive reform must include a means of fulfilling the needs of businesses seeking workers and protecting those workers from exploitation.

Comprehensive immigration reform must strengthen our national security. For too long, enforcement-only policies have dominated policy debates. This narrow focus weakens our nation's security by making undocumented immigrants, the majority of whom contribute to their communities, pay taxes and wish to become citizens, fearful of law enforcement. Establishing a path to earned legal status would enhance cooperation with law enforcement officials, positively contributing to the safety of all Americans.

Comprehensive immigration reform must also show respect for the humanity and dignity of each individual, even those here without documentation. In April 2009, Immigration and Customs Enforcement

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The Religious Action
Center operates under
the auspices of the
Commission on Social
Action of Reform
Judaism, a joint
instrumentality of the
Central Conference of
American Rabbis and
the Union for Reform
Judaism with its
affiliates:

American Conference of
Cantors

Association of Reform
Zionists of America

Canadian Association of
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(ICE) compiled a list of ninety people who had died in immigration detention centers since October of 2003. The conditions of our detention centers must be reformed along with deportation procedures that frequently leave individuals without adequate counsel or habeas corpus.

We read in the Torah more frequently than any other commandment that we should love the stranger as ourselves. For over 350 years, our Jewish ancestors have immigrated to this country in search of a more hopeful life, free from religious persecution and economic hardship, where family members have the chance to be reunited and contribute to their adopted home. Today's immigrants come here for the same reasons as our Jewish relatives. They come out of a love for their families, a passion and a desire to earn a better life, and a belief in the boundless opportunities of America. As a community of immigrants and refugees with a long history of sojourning in foreign lands, American Jews have a unique responsibility to ensure that the rights of non-citizens are protected by our nation's immigration policy

Comprehensive immigration reform is the only means forward that acknowledges the security, economic, and societal realities of 21st century America. We urge the Senate and House to enact bipartisan, comprehensive immigration reform that reunites families, helps our economy, protects the rights of all workers, and provides an opportunity for undocumented immigrants to earn their legal status.

Sincerely,

Mark J. Pelavin