



IMMIGRATION REFORM

Background and resources

In June 2013, the Senate passed the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act (S. 744). Passing with a large bipartisan margin of 68-32, this bill would reform our broken immigration system by reuniting families, offering a pathway to citizenship for millions of undocumented people, and enhancing protections for vulnerable migrants and refugees. While The Episcopal Church voiced grave concerns over the increased interior and border enforcement provisions of the bill, it provided an opportunity for meaningful reform of a system that does not serve our families, communities, or our economy.

In the year since S.744 passed, many immigration bills have been introduced in the House of Representatives, but the reform many hoped was at hand has not materialized. House leadership has refused to bring substantive immigration bills to the floor, despite widespread support at the grassroots and grass tops levels. In the meantime, the Obama administration has continued to deport undocumented immigrants at alarming rates, sowing fear throughout immigrant communities and tearing families apart. Amidst ongoing outcry from the immigrant, faith, business, and labor communities, deportations under President Obama surpassed 2 million in the spring, prompting the Administration to call for an administrative review of immigration enforcement policies. This review is expected to result in significant administrative action by the end of the summer.

The Episcopal Church remains committed to finding a legislative resolution and to working with all partners willing to meaningfully reform our immigration laws so that they protect families, offer access to citizenship, and respect the dignity of all human beings. In the absence of legislation, however, The Episcopal Church urges administration officials to use the authority they hold to pursue policies that keep families together, offer avenues of protection for those fleeing persecution, and to ensure that enforcement policies are proportional and humane. These guiding principles are informed by the experiences of Episcopalians in immigrant and refugee communities, where the price of inaction is visible every day. The following resolutions passed by Executive Council and General Convention guide the immigration and refugee advocacy of The Episcopal Church.



Citizenship

For the majority of the 11 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States, there is no accessible legal pathway through which they can adjust their status and therefore remain with their families and seek lawful employment. The Episcopal Church supports nothing less than a pathway to full citizenship for undocumented immigrants wishing to come out of the shadows and will not support overly punitive measures, such as making legalization contingent upon enforcement measures, or restricting access to basic civil rights afforded to citizens, such as voting, accessing child tax credits, or sponsoring family members.

RESOLUTIONS:

- Urge the U.S. Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform to give undocumented persons who have established roots in the United States a pathway to legalization and full social and economic integration into the United States. (GC '09)
- Adopt the fundamental principles that undocumented immigrants should have reasonable opportunity to pursue permanent residency; legal workers should be allowed to enter the U.S. to respond to recognized labor force needs; close family members should be allowed to reunite without undue delay with individuals lawfully present in the U.S.; fundamental principles of legal due process should be granted to all persons and enforcement of national borders and immigration policies should be proportional and humane. Furthermore, The Episcopal Church deplores any action on behalf of the government, which unduly emphasizes enforcement, including militarization of the border between the United States and Mexico. (GC '06)

Protection for refugees and other vulnerable migrants

The Episcopal Church supports a robust refugee resettlement program for those fleeing their countries to escape persecution, oppression, and war. Through Episcopal Migration Ministries, our Church has worked in public-private partnership with the U.S. Government to resettle thousands of refugees since the inception of the program in 1980. In the decades since this ministry to “welcome the stranger” began, however, we have welcomed an ev-



er-diversifying refugee population, including refugees from more than 69 nationalities, and an increasing number of refugees with serious medical conditions; refugees who are victims of torture and severe sexual-gender based violence; increased numbers of unaccompanied immigrant children; and more single female heads of household. The Episcopal Church is committed to welcoming all refugees to peaceful homes and hopeful futures in the United States, but the laws that govern our refugee resettlement program and immigration system must change if the United States is to continue as the world leader in humanitarian resettlement.

RESOLUTIONS:

- Urge the United States Congress to reform the Refugee Act of 1980 in order to modernize the nation's refugee program, including modernizations such as, but not limited to, meeting the urgent needs of a diverse refugee population through specialized and extended case management; culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services; recertification assistance for refugees with a professional background; restoration of federal benefits from 8 months to at least one year; housing and transportation assistance; and other innovative policies that create sustainable integration pathways for refugees. (GC '12)
- Urge the U.S. government to extend the protection of asylum to vulnerable peoples, especially women fleeing mutilation or cultural practices that deny their full humanity. (EC 2/04)

The DREAM Act

The Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act would provide a path to legal status for undocumented youth who arrived in this country as infants or children and have grown up as members of our communities. The Episcopal Church strongly supports the DREAM Act. This act would provide immigrant youth the opportunity to pursue higher education and/or serve the United States so that they can become fully contributing members of our communities and eventually become citizens of the United States. Every child growing up in America deserves the opportunity to grow into full stature as a member



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of our society and to achieve his or her dreams. Withholding legal status from these children not only hurts them, but it deprives America of future generations of dedicated citizens, innovators, entrepreneurs, and public servants. Without legislative reform, administrative programs such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals should be renewed, allowing these members of our communities to study and work free from the threat of deportation.

RESOLUTIONS:

- Support federal legislation that presents a pathway to citizenship for undocumented youth and young adults while assisting undocumented youth, known as “DREAMers,” in accessing higher education. (GC ‘12)
- Urge the U.S. government to allow undocumented youth who arrive as infants or children to pursue higher education and/or serve in the military in order to contribute to their communities and become citizens. (GC ‘09)

Enforcement

The Episcopal Church supports proportional and humane immigration enforcement policies that respect the dignity and worth of every human being. Those who break our immigration laws in order to do us harm need to be prevented from doing so, but the increased militarization of the border, programs that encourage racial profiling, and prison-like detention for migrants is not the solution. The Episcopal Church supports alternatives to costly and prison-like detention for individuals who pose no threat to public safety, and the end to programs that separate families and erode trust between law enforcement and immigrant communities, such as the 287-g and the Secure Communities program.

RESOLUTIONS:

- Decry the use of racial profiling as a reason to question an individual’s immigration status and call for the immediate end to the Secure Communities program, which leads to lengthy detention of immigrants who have no serious charges against them and discourages victims of crimes, such as domestic abuse, from reporting those crimes. (GC ‘12)



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- Urge the U.S. government to terminate any program that allows or funds local law enforcement agencies' enforcement of immigration law, thereby allowing immigrant victims of crime to report it without fear of deportation. (GC '09)
- Urge the U.S. government to establish a moratorium on roadside checkpoints and raids carried out by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that tear families apart. (GC '09)
- Urge the U.S. government to ensure that undocumented immigrant detainees are provided with humane treatment, adequate food and medical care, and sanitary conditions. (GC '09)
- Urge the U.S. government to consider alternatives to a costly prison-like detention system for immigrants. (GC '09)

Benefits for immigrants

The Episcopal Church believes that immigrants should not be unfairly barred from accessing benefits, such as coverage under the Affordable Care Act or federal student loans.

RESOLUTIONS:

- Urge the U.S. government to ensure that needy immigrants are not unfairly denied essential services and benefits. (GC '97)
- Support a welfare system that does not discriminate on the basis of marital status, age, legal immigrant status, or ability to identify other parent. (EC 2/95)