



WASHINGTON NEWSLETTER

FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION

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Immigration: Build Bridges, Not Walls

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Every person is a child of God. No matter someone's religion, country of origin, race, or wealth, we are called to acknowledge that divine spark and encounter each other with respect and compassion.

FCNL's lobbying on immigration flows directly from this belief. Yet immigrants today are as likely to face barricades, suspicion, and punishment as find opportunity and refuge. Our task as Friends and as advocates is to work for more just, humane policies.

"Getting Tough" on Immigration

For more than three decades, our government has created more punitive immigration laws rather than holistically addressing the system's flaws. Similarly, the U.S. criminal justice system in the same period created a mass incarceration epidemic in an effort to "get tough" on crime.

Two 1996 laws radically shifted the U.S. immigration system. The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act for the first time allowed the government to fast-track deportation proceedings, while the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) increased penalties on immigrants who had violated U.S. laws. As a result, more people became eligible for deportation, and undocumented immigrants had more difficulty applying for legal status.

These policies particularly harm immigrants of color, who are more likely to attract the attention of law enforcement. Racial profiling is documented both in immigration enforcement agencies and in local police departments who have been deputized to carry out federal immigration enforcement. This scrutiny disproportionately puts immigrants of color at risk for deportation or revocation of legal residency.

The vast majority of immigrants who face these consequences have been cited for minor offenses such as traffic violations, drug possession, or petty theft rather than violent crimes.

Following 9/11, immigration enforcement moved into the newly created Department of Homeland Security, as immigrants were increasingly perceived as national security threats, creating an extensive, expensive infrastructure. Between 2001 and 2017, the Border Patrol's budget increased by more than 230 percent.

How are we avoiding the biblical reproof, "I was a stranger and you did not welcome me"?

As congressional efforts to change the legal immigration system have floundered, administrations have used their executive authority to shape immigration policy. President Obama focused on removing people who were newer to the country, even as he established initiatives such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program to give undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children a reprieve from deportation.

Immigration Policy in the Trump Administration

One of President Trump's first acts as president was to sign an executive order increasing immigration enforcement and detention. His administration has rolled back DACA and ramped up efforts to find and deport people who lack proper documentation.

(continued on p. 7)

Enforcement Will Not Fix a Broken System

Congress and the administration are focused almost exclusively on catching, detaining, and deporting people who break immigration laws, rather than fixing the system itself and easing the pressures that drive people across our borders. The U.S. is wasting money, enriching private prison corporations, terrorizing border communities, racially profiling immigrants and U.S. citizens, tearing families apart, and abrogating Constitutional protections.

The Cost of Enforcement

Congress has done little to change the legal immigration system since 1990—except to beef up enforcement. The results:

- » **We're spending more money.** The border patrol's budget has increased more than 10-fold in the last 25 years. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) spending has increased by 85 percent since its beginning in 2003. That money is spent to hire more agents; detain more people; and create barriers and surveillance at the border, through drones and other means. Meanwhile, over the past 20 years, the number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. has increased.
- » **We aren't making our communities safer.** ICE is arresting more people—but more and more of those arrests are for non-violent or non-criminal activity. Focusing on arresting immigrants, no matter the severity of their violation, diverts resources from broader law enforcement efforts.
- » **We're increasing fear and suspicion among all immigrants.** As enforcement raids have increased and more people are at risk of immediate deportation, fear in immigrant communities has grown. Even if an individual is in the country legally, they could be challenged if they "look like" an immigrant—and have their status revoked for any violation of any law. As a result, immigrants are increasingly reluctant to engage with authorities in any way. A 2017 report found that 78 percent of immigrant survivors of trafficking, assault, or domestic violence were concerned about contacting the police, often citing fear of deportation.

- » **We're failing to honor the inherent dignity of immigrants.** About 70 percent of immigrants who get caught in the enforcement system are mandatorily detained, regardless of circumstance. Immigration detention facilities are routinely cited for inhumane conditions.

Our country's immigration system puts punishment ahead of compassion and even effectiveness, measuring success in the number of people arrested and deported and the number of beds filled in detention centers. This is the wrong approach.

Changing the System

Improving the legal immigration system will reduce the need for heightened enforcement. Reforms in family visas that allow loved ones to immigrate legally and create affordable, accessible, and expedient naturalization and citizenship processes would enable more people to immigrate legally who right now are circumventing the law.

Congress can also pay more attention to the impact of other U.S. policies on migration. Foreign policies that build peace and prevent violence, and economic policies that help workers support their families, reduce the incentives to move in search of work or safety.

Even without these large-scale changes, the U.S. can control its borders in ways that don't terrorize communities and do uphold the responsibility to care for those seeking refuge and asylum. Congress can insist on rigorous oversight over immigration detention and enforcement to reduce racial profiling and ensure that immigrants who are detained are held in humane conditions. Congress can diversify the consequences for immigration violations beyond detention and deportation. Judges can regain the power to consider mitigating circumstances and character in making immigration decisions. More immigrants can have the opportunity to find a place in this country and pursue citizenship.

The cost of the current enforcement-only approach is too high. We need to create a system that puts at its center concern for the safety and value of each person affected by immigration. 

A Look Back

Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees

1944

FCNL will work on “immigration and naturalization, maintenance of asylum for victims of racial and religious persecution, liberalization of our immigration laws, and adequate international efforts for resettlement of population displaced by the war...”

~First FCNL Statement of Legislative Policy, 1944

FCNL was founded in the midst of a massive refugee and displaced persons crisis. From its beginning, FCNL worked to assist refugees and liberalize the nation’s immigration policies. One dramatic success happened over 24 hours in 1949. Thanks to FCNL’s lobbying, the Senate restored \$2 million in aid to Palestinian refugees.

In its first three decades FCNL submitted 23 immigration policy testimonies by 17 witnesses to congressional committees. Friends pressed for the right of naturalization of Chinese and Japanese people and of other groups who had been denied the right of citizenship. FCNL also effectively stalled the 1947 Dolliver bill that would have prevented those who held pacifist views from entering the United States. Today, FCNL continues to advocate for fair and compassionate immigration policies. [f](#)

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Your meeting or church can share your discernment on FCNL’s priorities by April 13, 2018.

Find out more:
fcnl.org/priorities



THE HILL

Trump's Muslim ban — one year old and still discriminatory

By Yasmine Taeb, *Former FCNL lobbyist on human rights and civil liberties*

When I was 6 years old, my mother, three siblings, and I fled Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, seeking refuge in America. We had no way of knowing then that a president of the United States would one day create a dense web of policies that I think specifically target Iranians and Muslims. We knew only that my fifteen-year-old brother would soon be drafted and sent into battle to die.

Today, thousands of Iranians share the same American dream that my family has strived to realize. But the Trump administration has spent the last year slamming the door on refugees and travelers from Iran and other Muslim-majority nations...

Alongside countless U.S. citizens and immigrants from around the world, I envision a future in which the promise of our nation will be shared equally.

Read the article: fcnl.org/hill-yasmine

Welcoming Immigrants: 3 Ways for Congress to Act

Congress urgently needs to act on immigration—in the short term, to keep the current system from hurting more people and, ultimately, to rebuild that system in comprehensive and compassionate ways.

Previous presidents have used executive actions to mitigate some of the current system's failures. President Trump has not been willing to protect immigrants and those seeking refuge in the United States. In fact, this administration is making things worse. The only way forward is for members of Congress to legislate solutions.

What Congress Can Do Now

1) Refuse to spend billions of dollars for a border wall and more immigration enforcement.

Barricading our southern border, expanding detention, and hiring more people to police immigrants are expensive exercises in futility.

Collapsing economies, political and social unrest, and the need for workers in the U.S. drive immigrants to enter this country, with or without legal papers.

Members of Congress should refuse to spend taxpayer dollars on punitive proposals that ignore the wishes of communities along the border and violate immigrants' human and civil rights. Instead, they should focus on increasing accountability and oversight of existing enforcement.

2) Provide realistic pathways to legal status and citizenship for immigrants.

The byzantine and backlogged legal immigration system keeps families apart, strands immigrants in years of legal limbo, and forces choices between extended separation from loved ones and breaking the law. Changes to the legal immigration system would reduce the need for heightened enforcement. Most urgently, Congress needs to protect Dreamers, immigrants who came to the U.S. before age 18. President Trump ended protections for many of these young adults in late 2017, putting millions of people who have never known another home at risk of deportation. Congress should provide Dreamers with a path to citizenship.

3) Support welcoming refugees.

The Trump administration is letting in fewer refugees than previous administrations; revoking or refusing to renew Temporary Protected Status for refugees from El Salvador, Sudan, Nicaragua, Haiti and Syria; and refusing entry to refugees from many Muslim-majority countries entirely. An October 2017 executive order imposed onerous new data collection and application processes for refugees, making it doubtful the U.S. will even reach its historically low refugee admissions goal of 45,000 for 2018. While the president has broad leeway in taking these actions, public statements by members of Congress can help keep public attention on the issue and create opportunities for legislative action.

What You Can Do

How has immigration touched your life? Why does this issue matter to you, and what are you doing about it? When you share your story and your passion with members of Congress and candidates seeking to represent you, it makes a difference – in galvanizing their action and in setting their priorities. Your letters, calls, lobby visits, and letters to the editor can ensure that members of Congress have real, human faces and lives in the forefront of their minds when they make decisions about immigration policies.

The road to comprehensive changes starts now, with what Congress does this year. You have power to help shape that action. [!\[\]\(899d8b7697d64725bf017d3296cfcf1b_img.jpg\)](#)



Jose Mejia

Jose Mejia came to the U.S. from Mexico when he was just 2 years old. Now living in Staten Island, NY, he organized for immigration reform as part of FCNL's 2016-17 Advocacy Corps.

"All I have known is life in the United States," he says.

In April 2013, Jose received a reprieve from the threat of deportation through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. He was able to work legally, obtain a driver's license and health insurance, and pay for college. He studied to become a Certified Nursing Assistant to help take care of people in our country who are sick and disabled. He studied political science so he could go to law school and become an attorney.

Since President Trump rolled back DACA protections, Jose's future has been uncertain. "I have grown to become a strong undocumented student who will keep fighting for my community to achieve dignity, equity, and justice," he says. Congress needs to act so people like Jose can continue to pursue their dreams.

The Faith Community Responds

People of faith bring a powerful voice to advocacy on immigration. In Washington, FCNL co-chairs the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, bringing together nearly 50 organizations: interfaithimmigration.org

Locally, meetings, churches, and other faith groups are becoming communities of sanctuary, coming together to protect immigrants and other groups threatened by violence. That decision can also be a powerful lobbying tool when you tell members of Congress about your commitment to safety and inclusion. The American Friends Service Committee's Sanctuary Everywhere campaign has more information on this direct action approach: afsc.org/sanctuaryeverywhere 

SAVE THE DATE:

**Annual Meeting &
Quaker Public Policy
Institute**

**Nov. 29 - Dec. 2, 2018
Washington, DC**

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Ingrid Escalada Latorre

U.S. immigration laws employ a one-size-fits-all consequence. Once someone breaks the law, they face deportation, regardless of circumstances, the expense, or the impact on family and community. Ingrid Escalada Latorre's experience is one illustration of this problem.

Ingrid came to the U.S. from Peru nearly 20 years ago. To support herself and her family, she bought false papers, working her way up to running the kitchen at a nursing home before her arrest. She agreed to a felony plea, completing 4 ½ years of probation and paying \$11,500 in back taxes. The plea allowed her to avoid jail time, but it also automatically closed the door to changing her immigration status – a consequence she was not aware of when she accepted it.

Ingrid's ties to her community, her family, and the restitution she has made don't matter in the U.S. immigration system. Due to a sweeping 1996 law (IIRIRA), immigration judges can't consider any of those factors. As she faced deportation last year, Ingrid and her two citizen children took sanctuary, first at Mountain View Friends Meeting in Denver and then at Unitarian churches in Denver and Boulder.

Last fall, Ingrid joined with three other Colorado women in sanctuary to call on Congress to create a path to citizenship now. The Colorado Office of the American Friends Service Committee is supporting those efforts through two projects: Coloradans for Immigrant Rights and the Metro Denver Sanctuary Coalition. Learn more at peoplesresolution.org



Greisa Martínez Rosas is the deputy executive director of United We Dream, the largest immigrant youth network in the country. Born in Mexico, she grew up in Dallas, Texas before attending college and becoming a leader in the United We Dream movement.

We are seeds (from p. 8)

We know that the people who want to build more immigration detention camps are the same people who want to build more prisons for black people.

This is not just about the Dreamers with the caps and the gowns that are the doctors and the nurses. We are fighting for the people that are ordinary like me. That dropped out of school, that dropped out of college, that grew up poor in this country. You should not have to be extraordinary for your dignity and your humanity to be acknowledged.

And we belong to families. If you fight for the Dreamer, you fight for their mom and their dad that created them to be who they are. It's not just about the two million undocumented young people like me. It's about the 11 million people and it's not even about the 11 million people. It's about the millions of people that are poor and brown and black in this country and are women.

Last year has been the evidence of the validity of this Mexican proverb that my mom always used to say. "They tried to bury us. They did not know we were seeds." But you are a seed. With every single day that passes and every single time that you take action, you are sprouting your leaves.

Anyone who doubts our resolve does not have to believe us. They just have to watch us. 

Immigration (from p. 1)

In addition, in the midst of the largest worldwide refugee crisis in history, the U.S. will admit a historically low number of refugees in 2018. The administration has said it will not extend Temporary Protected Status for people from Haiti, El Salvador, Sudan, and elsewhere—threatening in some cases to send people back to their country of origin after decades in the United States.

Racism and xenophobia have always been a part of U.S. immigration policy, but under the Trump administration they are reaching new heights. From a travel ban that prevents people from several Muslim-majority countries from even visiting the U.S., to the president’s reported remarks bemoaning immigration from “s***hole” African and Latin American countries, racial and religious characteristics are being used to exclude.

As Rep. Luis Gutierrez (IL) observed, “When [the Trump administration talks] about people who speak English coming to the [U.S.], people highly educated coming to the [U.S.], and at the same time say we’re going to eliminate all of the categories of people who are coming from Latin America, Asia and Africa, I think two plus two is four, and that makes a racist policy.”

These policies are fundamentally changing the nature of U.S. immigration. While our borders have never been open to everyone, people from all over the world have historically been able to start new lives here. This administration is redrawing

the lines around what it means to be an “American,” leaving immigrants on the outside. The new mission statement for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services even removes references to our country as a “nation of immigrants” and downplays the agency’s role in helping people become citizens.

What We Can Do

Extending care and concern only to “true Americans” normalizes violence, degradation, and the violation of basic human rights. Our elected leaders need to hear—loudly, repeatedly, and insistently—that we are not in unity with laws and policies that deny the humanity and rights of immigrants. Efforts that exclude and punish by

race, religion, or other visible markers of difference cannot be supported. We must advocate for Congress to undertake a long-overdue overhaul of the legal immigration system and to curtail the administration’s attempts to reshape immigration policy.

In all this work, we can let our lives speak. How are we recognizing the divinity in each person, regardless of their immigration status or background, in our advocacy and our actions? How are we avoiding the reproof of Matthew 25:43, “I was a stranger and you did not welcome me”? How are we holding our members of Congress and our policymakers to the highest standard of compassion and justice in our immigration system?



You are the key to keeping FCNL strong for another 75 years. Would you consider making a one-time gift of \$75 or giving \$19.43 per month in honor of FCNL’s anniversary?

fcnl.org/donate



Inside:

- Immigration: Build Bridges Not Walls
- Enforcement Won't Fix a Broken System
- Report from Spring Lobby Weekend

Washington Newsletter No. 784, April 2018

They didn't know we were seeds

By Greisa Martínez Rosas

There are some people that I want you to meet.

Rosa Maria is a 10-year-old girl whose family was stopped on their way to a hospital by agents who followed them and waited for the sick girl to have surgery. After her surgery, ICE agents dragged her from the hospital room and into a detention camp. Rosa Maria grew up here just like you and I. She would qualify for the DREAM Act, but still, she remains without protection.

Luis came to the U.S. at the age of five, but right now he sits suffering in an immigration detention camp where he was severely beaten by agents as he screamed for help to save his life.

Ede is a young man who was dragged to a detention camp on his way to get some Starbucks and signed his deportation order just a couple of days ago because he could no longer bear the psychological torture or inhumane conditions of a detention camp that he was in.

Dennis was on his way to soccer practice at his high school earlier this year right here in this country. He has spent more than two months of his senior year in a detention center because he responded to attacks of a racist bully in his school campus. School police got involved and then ICE got him. Now he's in a detention camp living through hell as the agents try to deport him.

This could be the story of this past couple of years. More names, even my own added to this list of people. But, I know that we will do what we can to ensure that this does not happen to millions of more people because we refuse to let the darkness win.

We know that the people who want to deport immigrants are the same people who want to silence women. We know that the people who want to turn campus police into immigration agents are the same people who want to block access to higher education.

(continued on p. 6)