

February 26, 2009

RE: Support for the Immigration Oversight and Fairness Act of 2009

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned faith, human rights, civil liberties, refugee and immigrant, and community organizations urge you to support the Immigration Oversight and Fairness Act of 2009, sponsored by Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA). This bill would implement critically needed reforms to our failing immigration detention system and reclaim America's standing as a welcoming and just nation that accords everyone dignity and respect.

In recent years, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has dramatically increased the use of punitive enforcement measures, including jail-like detention, against non-citizens. In 2008, more than 300,000 people were placed in detention, and on any given day over 30,000 people were locked up. The federal government's efforts to apprehend, detain and deport non-citizens is sowing fear in our communities and tearing families apart. Many who are detained pose no threat to the community or public safety, and they include vulnerable populations such as asylum seekers, torture survivors, children, pregnant women, families with minor children and the elderly.

The Immigration Oversight and Fairness Act of 2009 could not have come at a more critical time. In 2008, *60 Minutes*, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* reported on the substandard medical care in immigration detention facilities. More reports of deaths in detention and poor practices came out this year. Indeed at least 80 people died while in DHS detention during a 5-year period beginning in 2003. Some of those deaths, such as the case of Francisco Castaneda who died of cancer after his pleas for medical care went ignored for months, likely could have been prevented if adequate treatment were provided. Audits conducted in 2007 by DHS's Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office revealed that DHS's system for monitoring detention conditions is deficient. Additionally, the bipartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom found, in a study requested by Congress, that U.S. asylum seekers are detained under "inappropriate" and "jail-like conditions."

Our nation should provide safe and humane detention conditions for anyone detained, and this bill accomplishes that by requiring the government to implement clear and enforceable standards. Specifically, the legislation would improve detainees' access to telephones and medical care, including treatment for sexual abuse survivors. Proper mental health care is even more critical for those who have suffered persecution, torture and other trauma, and are at grave risk while in confinement.

The federal government's increased use of immigration detention costs taxpayers nearly \$2 billion per year. In response to these escalating costs, the Immigration Oversight and Fairness Act of 2009 would promote alternatives to detention programs that would enable

vulnerable detainees and others to be released into the community on their own recognizance, bond, or through non-custodial supervision programs that are more humane and cost a fraction of the price of incarceration. The bill would save taxpayers millions of dollars and allow men and women to return to their families and communities while they go through the immigration processing system.

Lastly, the Immigration Oversight and Fairness Act of 2009 provides protections for unaccompanied children who are taken into DHS custody and endure horrible conditions at stations along the border. Internal DHS protocols state that children should have access to food and water as well as appropriate shelter while in DHS custody. Despite these guidelines, a disturbing number of children report dehumanizing treatment, inadequate food and bedding, lack of emergency medical care and deprivations of basic due process. This bill would improve general protections for this vulnerable group, enhance training for DHS officials to ensure they treat children properly and facilitate the speedy transfer of children to better-equipped shelter facilities.

We urge you to support this legislation to restore this nation's commitment to humanitarian values, due process, civil liberties and human rights, to ensure immigrant detainees are treated humanely, to expand the use of community-based alternatives to detention and other release options, and to protect vulnerable children. The federal government's skyrocketing use of detention is having a devastating impact on our children, families and communities and is undermining this country's commitment to provide refuge to victims of persecution. The Immigration Oversight and Fairness Act of 2009 makes great strides in improving this faltering detention system.

Sincerely,

NATIONAL

The Advocates for Human Rights
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Humane Association
American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA)
American Jewish Committee
Asian American Justice Center (AAJC)
Bill of Rights Defense Committee
Chaldean Federation of America
Church World Service, Immigration and Refugee Program
Coalition for Irish Immigration Centers
The Episcopal Church
Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc.
Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)
General Commission on Religion and Race, United Methodist Church
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)
Human Rights First
Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC)
Immigration Equality
Irish Apostolate USA

Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Leadership Council on Civil Rights
League of United National Latin American Citizens
Legal Momentum
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS)
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
Muslim Advocates
National Council on La Raza (NCLR)
National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON)
National Immigration Forum
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
National Network for Arab American Communities
National Organization for Women
OneAmerica
Rights Working Group
Sikh Council on Religion and Education
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
General Commission on Religion and Race, United Methodist Church
Women's Refugee Commission
World Organization for Human Rights

LOCAL/STATE/REGIONAL

Arizona

The Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project

Border Region

Border Network for Human Rights

California

All Saints Episcopal Church-Pasadena, Immigration Task Force
Asian Law Alliance
Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California
California Church IMPACT
Central American Resource Center, Los Angeles
The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA)
Korean Resource Center (KRC), Los Angeles, CA
L.A. Community Legal Center and Educational
Lutheran Office of Public Policy – California
Marin Interfaith Worker Justice
Progressive Jewish Alliance, California
Public Counsel

Florida

Honduran Unity-Unidad Hondurena
Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center (FIAC)

Georgia

Latinos for Education & Justice Org., Inc.

Illinois

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Korean American Resource & Cultural Center (KRCC), Chicago, IL
Lutheran Social Services of Illinois and Lutheran Advocacy—Illinois

Massachusetts

Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA)

Michigan

Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services

Mississippi

El Pueblo

Nebraska

Justice and Advocacy Ministries, ELCA-NE

New Jersey

First Friends
International Institute of New Jersey
IRATE
Ironbound Community Corporation
Grupo Cajola en Morristown, NJ
Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry in New Jersey
Mujeres Unidas por Nuestros Derechos MUND (Women United for our Rights)
New Jersey Immigrant Policy Network
Pax Christi NJ
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network of NJ

New Mexico

Immaculate Conception Church
Jesuit Community of Immaculate Conception Church
Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-New Mexico

New York

Arab American Family Support Center
Journey's End Refugee Services Inc
Judson Memorial Church, New York City
Long Island Immigrant Alliance

Lutheran Statewide Advocacy (New York)
New Sanctuary Movement, New York City
New York Episcopal Public Policy Network
New York Immigration Coalition

North Carolina

FaithAction International House

Northeast Region

Lutheran Social Services of New England

Northwest Region

Northwest Federation of Community Organizations (Washington)

Ohio

St. Mary Hispanic Ministry, Marion

Pennsylvania

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa)
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Philadelphia Arab American Community Development Corporation

Rhode Island

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
Open Table of Christ United Methodist Church
Zion Korean United Methodist Church

South and Midwest Region

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, South Central Community

Texas

Paso del Norte Civil Rights Project, El Paso, TX

Virginia

Tahirih Justice Center

Washington

Washington Defender Association's Immigration Project
Washington Community Action Network

Wisconsin

La Causa, Inc.
St. Norbert Abbey Justice and Peace Committee