



Pathway to an American Dream

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My father is an immigrant. He worked hard to earn a college degree, raise a family, and contribute to his community.

Immigrants come here today for the same American dream. Today's immigration process is more difficult, and the number of visas to enter legally does not meet our need for workers. Our current immigration system separates families, traps millions of unauthorized immigrants in the shadows, and betrays our nation's values. *It's time to fix a broken immigration system.*

On June 27, 2013 the Senate passed S. 744, the *Border Security, Economic Competitiveness, and Immigration Innovation Act*. S. 744 provides an earned legalization process for 11 million unauthorized immigrants. The Act would allow unauthorized migrants who pass background checks, pay stiff fines and come up to date on back taxes to go to the end of the line and, after at least 13 years, earn citizenship. They would also need to learn English and maintain steady employment. This is a far cry from the "amnesty" that many oppose. A proposal that would create a pathway to legal status but stops short of citizenship is not consistent with who we strive to be as a nation. This type of proposal would create a permanent underclass in our society, a portion of the population without the same rights as the majority.

The family is the central social institution that must be supported, not undermined. Immigration reform must facilitate family reunification. Family unity spurs integration, as families provide strong foundations for learning English, purchasing a home, pursuing employment, starting a business, preparing children for school, and contributing to communities.

Our current immigration process pulls families apart. More than 200,000 immigrants with U.S.-citizen children were deported between 2010 and 2012 alone, according to federal data. It is common – and legal under the current law – for parents to be forcibly removed from the presence of their children. This has happened in the New Haven neighborhood where I work. When parents have been detained or deported, hope for the American dream is critically diminished.

Under the current immigration system, it is not uncommon for some to have to wait many years for a visa so that they can be reunited with their family members who are U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents. To fix the immigration system, we need to recognize the God-given desire to be with one's family.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform is not just a moral issue. It is also an unrecognized economic issue. The myth that immigrants take jobs away from native-born Americans and hurt the economy is used to create fear and divide. Unauthorized immigrants are integral to Connecticut's economy as workers. Unauthorized immigrants comprised roughly 4.5% of the state's workforce (or 85,000 workers) in 2010, according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center.

If all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Connecticut, the state would lose \$5.6 billion in economic activity, \$2.5 billion in gross state product, and approximately 24,119 jobs, according to a report by the Perryman Group. (www.immigrationpolicy.org)

Our state is a leader in immigrant rights. In 2011 we passed the “in-state tuition bill” and in 2013 we passed an Act for Drivers’ Licenses, allowing all residents of CT, regardless of immigration status, access to drivers’ licenses. But our state can only go so far in addressing the current situation. We need the help of our federal government.

The U.S. House of Representatives has the opportunity to address immigration reform legislation that can provide significant relief to potentially millions of people and their families. I urge the Connecticut delegation to help fix our broken immigration system. Our country needs a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, one that prioritizes family unity because strong families are the backbone of American society.

The Office for Catholic Social Justice Ministry of the Archdiocese of Hartford assists in the implementation of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Justice for Immigrants Campaign in the Archdiocese of Hartford.