

WHY SHOULD AN IMMIGRATION REFORM BILL INCLUDE A PATH TO CITIZENSHIP?

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Background. The U.S. Senate recently passed an immigration bill that contains a path to citizenship for 11 million undocumented persons in the country. The House of Representatives has, to date, refused to consider a bill with a path to citizenship, suggesting that they could simply give legal status to some immigrants or not confer any legal status at all. The U.S. Catholic bishops strongly support a path to citizenship for the undocumented, for the following reasons:

- An immigration bill that does not provide a path to citizenship but simply legal status to the 11 million would sanction a permanent underclass in our society, with one portion of the population without the same rights as the majority. As U.S. history has informed us, this is a recipe for social unrest and potential exploitation of a minority population, contrary to the founding ideals of the republic. It would keep a large group in our country disenfranchised, unable to petition their government as the majority can and unable to choose their leaders. This is not the American way.
- Citizenship provides full protection from deportation. Under current law, a person can be deported for a wide variety of non-violent offenses, such as drug possession, petty larceny, or fraud, **even if they are permanent residents with a green card.** With citizenship, the federal government cannot deport a person from the country, away from their family and livelihood. Thus, anything less than citizenship would subject a portion of the population to penalties not applicable to the majority.
- Citizenship confers full membership in our society and provides full protection from our government against foreign actors. For example, a U.S. citizen can receive protection from the U.S. government overseas in a crisis situation, or from requests from a foreign government for extradition. U.S. citizens also can travel more freely, as they are able to use a U.S. passport and thus gain admittance to other countries without needing a visa.
- A path to citizenship would ensure those who earn their citizenship are good citizens. If they are willing to meet all the requirements to become an American citizen, then they certainly will appreciate U.S. citizens and contribute to their new nation. Are these not the type of citizens our government would want? It also would ensure that immigrants take pride in their new country and are socially accepted in our culture.
- A path to citizenship would not be an amnesty, as many would argue, but would require immigrants to earn their way and pay restitution for their illegal presence. They also would have to learn English and work. This is not an amnesty, or giveaway, as Webster dictionary defines the word.
- Providing citizenship to immigrants does not mean they would vote for one party over another. Immigrant populations are just like any other group of persons, they have a wide range of political views and loyalties.

