

*As the House of Representatives begins debate on immigration reform, 93 Catholic university presidents were joined by academics in sending the following letter on July 18, 2013, to every Catholic member of the House of Representatives, including House Speaker John Boehner and Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi.*

Dear Representative:

As educators preparing the next generation of American leaders to serve the common good, we are deeply engaged in the current debate over immigration reform.

Catholic colleges and universities have a proud history of providing opportunities to immigrants who enrich our nation with creativity, hard work and public service. Together we represent universities that educate more than 290,000 students. Leaders on Catholic campuses advocated for the DREAM Act, and we stand with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in urging Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform that includes a road to earned citizenship. Our broken immigration system, which tears parents from children, traps aspiring Americans in the shadows and undermines the best values of this nation, is morally indefensible.

We hope that as you face intense political pressure from powerful interest groups, you will draw wisdom and moral courage from our shared faith tradition. Catholic teaching values the human dignity and worth of all immigrants, regardless of legal status. We remind you that no human being made in the image of God is illegal. The Vatican's *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* warns against the exploitation of immigrant workers and says "immigrants are to be received as persons and helped, together with their families, to become a part of societal life." We are part of an immigrant church in an immigrant nation.

As Catholics engaged in public service, you have a serious responsibility to consider the moral dimensions of policy decisions. Our immigration system is so deeply flawed, and in such urgent need of repair, that inaction is unacceptable. As Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles, the chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration, said last month:

*"Each day in our parishes, social service programs, hospitals, and schools we witness the human consequences of a broken immigration system. Families are separated, migrant workers are exploited, and our fellow human beings die in the desert. Without positive change to our immigration laws, we cannot help our brothers and sisters. Simply put, the status quo is morally unacceptable. This suffering must end."*

You face a complex issue that defies easy solutions and narrow partisan agendas. The United States is a nation of laws. It is also a nation built by immigrants. Our faith tradition rejects false choices between freedom and responsibility, individual rights and collective obligations. We urge you to reject the false choices and divisive rhetoric that have too often characterized this debate. Protecting our borders and creating an earned path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants already in this country are not competing interests.

Please be assured of our prayers as you put prudence, human dignity and the common good at the center of your deliberations.

Sincerely,

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