



February 13, 2013

The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Chairman
The Honorable Charles Schumer, Chairman, Immigration, Refugees and Border Security
Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Hearing, "Comprehensive Immigration Reform"

Dear Chairman Leahy and Chairman Schumer:

Thank you for holding this hearing and for turning your attention to the critical issue of comprehensive immigration reform. Our broken immigration system harms families, communities and our nation as a whole. It creates instability for families, deprives millions of working Americans of civil rights and workplace protections, and prevents many who are providing for their families, paying taxes and contributing to their communities from fully integrating into our country. In 2012, Americans voted in great numbers for candidates who promised workable, common-sense solutions to our immigration crisis. Piecemeal legislation will not fix our system in the long term. Now is the time to pursue strong, lasting, comprehensive reform.

People For the American Way, our members and supporters across the country, and members of our advocacy networks urge you to create a viable comprehensive immigration reform plan that will strengthen our economic security and conform to our national values. Such a plan must provide undocumented workers already in the country with a path to citizenship so they can fully contribute to our economy and society. It must reduce the backlog of individuals seeking residency and citizenship by creating a more robust and flexible visa program. It must recognize that immigrants are an integral part of our labor force by addressing employment-based immigration needs. It must ensure strong worker protections and address our enforcement needs in a manner that is just and consistent with our existing due process and civil rights laws. And it must reunite American families by allowing US citizens or permanent residents to sponsor their same-sex partners for immigration to the US, a right that is currently denied based solely on their sexual orientation.

People For the American Way's advocacy networks represent three communities that have confronted our broken immigration system firsthand and have strong stakes in comprehensive immigration reform. **YP4 Action** represents youth organizers on campuses across the country, a number of whom have undocumented family members or are themselves undocumented. All of these organizers are leading efforts to create positive social change in their communities and their country, regardless of immigration status. **YEO Action** represents young, progressive elected officials, who feel the impact of federal immigration policy with their constituents at the state and local level. Finally, **African American Ministers in Action** represents a multid denominational network of African American clergy, many of whom serve as faith leaders for immigrant communities, in particular those from Africa, Haiti and the Caribbean.

Together, People For the American Way and its advocacy networks urge you to adopt a comprehensive immigration reform package that creates a healthy, practical, commonsense immigration system worthy of the country it serves.

YP4 Action

YP4 Action is the advocacy affiliate of People For the American Way Foundation's Young People For program, which develops young progressive leaders on campuses throughout the country. Many of the young people we work with are immigrants or the children of immigrants, and many more have friends and classmates who are personally affected by today's broken immigration system. President Obama's executive order partially implementing the DREAM Act allowed thousands of young undocumented immigrants to come out of the shadows and publicly give back to their country. Any comprehensive reform package must include expanded and strengthened provisions that afford young undocumented immigrants the opportunity to earn a path to citizenship, to pursue an affordable higher education and to give back to the country they love.

Many of our members have also experienced firsthand the impact that our immigration system has on binational families. Any immigration reform package must place a priority on uniting families, including those led by LGBT parents.

YEO Action

YEO Action, the advocacy affiliate of People For the American Way Foundation's Young Elected Officials Network, represents young progressive elected officials in federal, state and local offices. State and local elected officials see firsthand the impact that federal immigration policy has on their constituents. School board members face the challenge of ensuring that the children of undocumented parents have access to education and opportunity. City council members and mayors must ensure that immigrants in their communities – documented and undocumented – have the protection of and are treated fairly by law enforcement. Progressive state legislators face battles over extreme state-level legislation proposed in the absence of federal reform and must work to ensure that all residents of their states have access to education, law enforcement protection, and health and human services.

Too often, our state and local elected officials are left picking up the pieces of a federal immigration system that has not kept pace with reality. A broken immigration system undermines the efforts of state and local elected officials to serve their constituents through effective law enforcement, public safety, public health and education. Congress must pass a comprehensive immigration reform package that acknowledges the contributions that immigrants are making across the country and allows undocumented immigrants and their children to come out of the shadows.

African American Ministers in Action

As community and faith leaders, members of **African American Ministers in Action** are concerned about building a system that works for all immigrants. AAMIA's members work particularly closely with immigrants from Africa, Haiti and the Caribbean, whose needs are too often overlooked in the immigration reform debate. The tragedy last year when eleven Haitians, including four children, drowned after their boat capsized on its way to Florida highlights the necessity of improving the asylum

process, especially for our close neighbors in Haiti. We must also strengthen our refugee resettlement program and provide it with adequate resources to help refugees adjust upon their arrival in the United States.

It is critical for all immigrants, including those from Africa, Haiti and the Caribbean, that we build a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who are already living in our country and contributing to our society. These immigrants, like those before them, have built lives in this country and are contributing to our economic and social fabric. They must be brought out of the shadows.

Lastly, as faith leaders, AAMIA's members wish to ensure that any comprehensive immigration reform treats all individuals and families with dignity and respect. This includes placing a priority on family reunification, providing safety and shelter for refugees and ensuring due process for every immigrant, regardless of country of origin.

Conclusion

The challenges that our country's immigration system faces are complex and require a thoughtful, far-sighted and broad solution. Congress must resist efforts to address these complex problems in a piecemeal fashion and must instead confront this critical issue with a bold, comprehensive plan. With comprehensive immigration reform we have the opportunity to create a positive change in millions of American lives and to set our country on a strong, stable course for the future. We urge Congress to seize this opportunity. People For the American Way and our advocacy networks look forward to working with you to advance these much needed reforms.

Sincerely,



Marge Baker
Executive Vice President for Policy and Program



Andrew Gillum
Director of Youth Leadership Programs



Joy Lawson
Director, YP4 Action



Minister Leslie Watson Malachi
Director, African American Religious Affairs

CC: Ranking Member Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member John Cornyn, Immigration, Refugees and Border Security
Committee Members