



United States  
Conference of  
Catholic Bishops

Committee on  
Migration

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The Honorable Jim Jordan  
Chairman  
Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20005

The Honorable Jamie Raskin  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Chairman Jordan and Ranking Member Raskin:

I write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration to express our opposition to the Deport Alien Gang Members Act (H.R. 175). We undoubtedly support efforts to bring to justice those who seek to do harm within American communities, including noncitizens. As written, however, this bill is unjustifiably broad and risks implicating the victims of criminal gangs, as well as Catholics and other people of faith serving immigrants in accordance with our sincerely held religious beliefs. Recognizing these outcomes are likely unintended, we strongly urge you to reject this bill.

H.R. 175 establishes both an expansive definition of "criminal gang" and a very low threshold for what constitutes association with such a group. The bill deems those who the government merely has "reason to believe" have ever been associated with the activities of a gang under the bill's far-reaching definition to be inadmissible, deportable, and subject to mandatory detention. Additionally, because of this perceived association, such individuals would be automatically ineligible for *any* legal benefit under our nation's immigration laws, including asylum. The bill in no way accounts for those forced to engage in covered activities under duress, creating conflicts with existing law, even as criminal enterprises frequently rely on such tactics to exploit vulnerable persons. For this reason, we are especially concerned about the lack of safeguards in the bill for minors and victims of human trafficking. Furthermore, without a clear standard of intent provided, the bill's penalties would apply even to those who unknowingly "aided" the activities of a criminal gang.

We are also concerned that those engaged in bona fide religious and humanitarian efforts, whether undertaken inside or outside the United States, could be found to be "associated" with a criminal gang under this bill. In effect, foreign-born religious workers, such as priests and religious sisters, while being compelled as a primary purpose of their vocations to assist with others' basic needs, could be subjected to the designation under section 2(a) of the bill and its corresponding consequences for individuals.

Given these significant defects, we ask you to reject this bill and to instead work toward meaningful and bipartisan reforms of our immigration system that uphold protections for the vulnerable and ensure religious and humanitarian services can be provided in good faith to all in need.

Respectfully,

Most Reverend Brendan J. Cahill  
Bishop of Victoria  
Chairman, Committee on Migration