



STATEMENT FOR THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Hearing on the U.S. Immigration System: The Need for Bold Reforms

February 11, 2021

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice is a national organization of more than 90,000 social justice advocates across the United States inspired by Catholic Sisters. NETWORK educates, organizes, and lobbies for social and economic transformation through federal policies.

NETWORK is pleased to submit this statement to the U.S. House Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship of the Committee on the Judiciary for the hearing 'The U.S. Immigration System: The Need for Bold Reforms.' We appreciate the subcommittee conducting this important hearing.

NETWORK believes in the dignity of all people and has advocated for bold immigration reforms for the past 50 years. Catholic Social Justice teaches that all people are made in the image and likeness of God and so possess an equal and inalienable worth. Because of this essential dignity, each person has a right to what is necessary to reach her or his full potential as intended by God.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of our immigration system. 5.5 million [undocumented immigrants are essential workers](#), including 425,000 who are healthcare workers. Immigrants have always been at the heart of our national community and identity, but this pandemic has demonstrated that without immigrants, we cannot survive. For example, 1.7 million undocumented workers are essential to our food supply. Undocumented individuals have always been essential in this country and the pandemic has only amplified that truth. Undocumented immigrants can no longer be defined by their legal status. They are members of our communities. They have families of their own. They are equal.

The United States has often highlighted the contributions of essential workers and expressed gratitude to them throughout these painful 11 months. However, undocumented individuals are frequently excluded from that gratitude, as they were with the distribution of [stimulus checks](#). Our undocumented neighbors have worked through this pandemic without equal treatment or government support. COVID-19 relief is necessary for all of us, and 'us' includes our undocumented community members. People do not lose their dignity or their humanity simply because of they lack the correct paperwork.

During the past four years, we have also witnessed continued violence and negligence on our borders against those most in need. [Since 2017](#), 39 adults have died, all while in U.S. custody, or immediately after being released, with independent experts finding that subpar care contributed to these deaths. One Louisiana detention center had multiple reports of no access to soap for bathing or any cleaning supplies. [This research](#) was concluded prior to the pandemic; however, reports from immigrant advocates have not indicated any improvement. Erika Pinheiro, litigation director of *Al Otro Lado*, [reported](#) a continued problem "with ICE hospitalizing people, releasing them, and then they die," and the death goes unreported by ICE. Last summer, a U.S. District Judge [stated that](#) ICE has demonstrated "deliberate indifference to the risk of an outbreak" and that the agency has "lost the right to be trusted."

In the United States today, we have families separated on our border enduring inhumane treatment and within our borders, undocumented people working without basic protections. The previous Administration took an already broken immigration system and broke it in new ways, without any consideration of for the families and people whose lives are at stake.

Repairing our nation's broken immigration system requires acknowledging the positive contributions of undocumented immigrants currently residing in the U.S. and providing a real pathway for them to apply for citizenship. The United States must also provide opportunities for new immigrants to enter our country through family-based visas, humane guestworker programs, and other visa-based systems based on contemporary circumstances rather than arbitrary allotments.

Now we must act boldly in order to heal and transform our immigration system. It is time for Congress to enact policies to reunite families, provide real opportunities for undocumented immigrants to apply for citizenship, welcome asylum seekers, and grow compassion in our communities.

Sources:

1. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2020/12/02/493307/protecting-undocumented-workers-pandemics-front-lines/>
2. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/content/mixed-status-families-ineligible-pandemic-stimulus-checks>
3. <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/conditions-in-migrant-detention-centers>
4. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/30/us-new-report-shines-spotlight-abuses-and-growth-immigrant-detention-under-trump>
5. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/how-ice-data-undercounts-covid-19-victims/>
6. <https://www.sfchronicle.com/news/article/Judge-orders-Bakersfield-immigration-holding-15465171.php>