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February 11, 2021

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
6320 O'Neill House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Reform Jewish Movement's support of compassionate, just, and equitable immigration and refugee policy in the 117th Congress

Dear Chairwoman Lofgren, Vice Chairwoman Jayapal, and Ranking Member Buck,

On behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose nearly 850 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, whose membership includes more than 2,000 Reform rabbis, I write to convey our profound support for the passage of compassionate, just, and equitable immigration and refugee policy in the 117th Congress. We are grateful to the leadership of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship for holding today's hearing.

A sweeping, legislative fix to our broken immigration system has taken on new urgency. Over the past four years, the Trump administration stepped up deportations, drastically cut refugee admissions numbers, barred asylum seekers from making asylum claims without due process, criminalized unauthorized border crossings resulting in family separation, forced immigrants to choose between advancing their immigration status and accessing essential public benefits like health care, nutrition, and housing, and more.

We call upon Congress and the new administration to recognize and address the racism that underpins the U.S. immigration system, ensuring it is no longer used as a weapon, including against Black and Brown communities within and beyond U.S. borders. We demand that the criminal justice and immigration detention systems, both profit-driven and interconnected, are no longer used to further harm immigrants and communities of Color. We call on Congress alongside the new administration to enact anti-racist policies that reimagine the foundation of the immigration system and ensure accountability and oversight to uphold an equitable system.

No less than 36 times, the Torah instructs us on how to treat the *ger*, the foreigner among us. God commands, "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:34).

Guided by this repeated injunction to love the stranger, the Reform Jewish Movement has long



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been committed to fixing our fractured immigration system and ensuring just and compassionate immigration policies are enacted.

DACA, TPS, and DED

As you know, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program provided security to over 800,000 undocumented young people who grew up in this country and wish to continue to contribute to it. Painfully, the Trump administration's repeated and shameful efforts to terminate DACA put these youth at risk of deportation. The previous administration also terminated Temporary Protected Status (TPS)—a humanitarian form of immigration status for those who cannot safely return to their home country due to extraordinary circumstances, like armed conflict and environmental disaster—for 98 percent of all holders.

Congress must immediately pass permanent protections for DACA recipients and TPS visa holders that include a pathway to citizenship. We call upon Congress to pass legislation like the American Dream and Promise Act of 2019 (H.R.6 in the 116th Congress), which would provide pathways to citizenship for immigrant youth and recipients of TPS and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED). As many of these immigrants have called the U.S. home for decades, these bills would be an important step towards providing undocumented and under-documented immigrants with permanent protection.

Refugee Resettlement

The world is facing the worst refugee crisis in global history. There are 79.5 million people worldwide who have left home to escape conflict and persecution, surpassing the previous record of displaced persons after World War II. Refugees—those forced to flee their country for fear of persecution, war, or violence—account for about 26 million of those displaced.

The Trump administration consecutively set record low refugee admissions ceilings, leaving the U.S. with a Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 admissions goal of 15,000 refugees, the lowest since the adoption of the Refugee Act of 1980. We applaud the Biden-Harris administration's commitment to raise the refugee admissions goal to 125,000 in FY 2022, and we encourage Congress to do everything in its power to support this robust resettlement goal.

We also call upon Congress to pass the National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants Act, the NO BAN Act (H.R.2214/S.1123 in the 116th Congress). This legislation would repeal all versions of the refugee, Muslim-targeted travel bans and asylum bans, require travel restrictions to be fact-based and time-limited, and prevent future discriminatory travel bans like those under the Trump administration.

Asylum

The U.S. asylum system has been meticulously dismantled over the past several years, with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) often restricting asylum seekers' access to due process, representation, and proper care, all things that the U.S. is obligated to provide under law. Members of Congress have also attempted to squash asylum through legislation like the Secure and Protect Act of 2019 (S.1494 in the 116th Congress), which would have barred thousands of Central American asylum seekers from



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applying for life-saving protection in the United States, jailed kids and families for long periods of time, and quickly deported children who arrive in the United States alone without due process.

We demand that Congress does everything in its power to reject policies that undermine the U.S. asylum system, urge the passage of legislation that upholds the integrity of the asylum system, and supports the rights and dignity of all migrants, regardless of faith, race, sex (sexual orientation and gender identity), nationality, place of birth, ability, or socioeconomic status. We call upon Congress to ensure that all who claim a well-founded fear of persecution are granted fair and legal access to the asylum system and that unaccompanied minors be granted the utmost protection, representation, and care.

Border & Interior Enforcement and Detention

The new administration must reduce and work to end reliance on immigration detention. This enforcement strategy has failed to uphold basic standards of care for adults, families, and children alike and has stripped immigrants of their dignity and autonomy.

We encourage Congress to decrease funding for ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and encourage you to ensure that no appropriated funds are used towards increased militarization of the border and border communities, harsh or inhumane border or interior enforcement, or a physical barrier like a wall on the Southwest border. Instead, we encourage increased oversight and accountability for the actions of agency officials, the end of contracts with for-profit prisons and detention centers, an end to cooperation between ICE and local law enforcement, and the investment of funding in alternatives to detention (ATD) programs. We have also called on the administration to uphold the standard for the detention and release of unaccompanied minors as outlined in the Flores Settlement Agreement, while refusing to make use of the indefinite family detention loophole. Congress can play a key role in investigating and holding ICE and CBP accountable.

Finally, as you ensure national security through safe, common-sense, and humane border enforcement, we encourage you consult with immigrants, border communities, environmentalist groups, and Indigenous communities. This will help ensure that border enforcement methods are non-invasive, are proven methods of enforcement, and don not implicitly or explicitly disproportionately negatively impact certain groups of people.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our Movement's perspective on this critical issue. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner
Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism



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