

We stand united for immigration reform

A Talmudic tradition tells us we should think twice when we distinguish ourselves from others as citizens with rights and privileges. It urges us to take the biblical reminder seriously: “You were strangers.” Because we were all strangers, it would be arrogant to “point out the wounds in others.” If we go back far enough, we would discover they were once “our own wounds.” Who among us didn’t have an ancestor who ached to belong? Whose family wasn’t at a certain point marginal or an immigrant?

It’s for this reason that we join with numerous organizations, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Association of Evangelicals, National Council of Churches, National Hispanic Leadership Conference, New Sanctuary Movement, Church World Service, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee and Jewish Council for Public Affairs, in an urgent call for the U.S. Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform. Without such action at the federal level, the recent passage of immigration legislation, S.B. 1070, by the Arizona Legislature will act as a catalyst for other legislative bodies throughout the country to consider similar anti-immigrant laws. This will create a patchwork of immigration laws and regulations resulting in the further marginalization of immigrants throughout the country. It will also create a climate of fear and intolerance affecting citizens and non-citizens alike. Today similar legislation is pending in at least 12 states.

S.B. 1070 gives local police the authority to investigate and detain people for perceived immigration violations without the benefit of proper training or oversight, worsening the problem of racial profiling and raising concerns about the prolonged detention of citizens and legal residents. These immigration bills, if enacted, will ultimately force U.S. citizens and non-citizens alike to carry papers at all times and to “show their papers” simply for looking or sounding “foreign.” The United States has never been a country in which residents are required to carry papers, but S.B. 1070 and similar bills in other states move us in that direction.

We take to heart the biblical instruction: “When an immigrant resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the immigrant. The immigrant who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the immigrant as yourself, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

Called by the demands of our faith, we echo the sentiments expressed by many religious leaders for the calling of a bipartisan summit with the goal of passing comprehensive immigration reform this year. Delays will only put additional stress on local communities, marginalize our nation’s immigrants and make more difficult the implementation of the reform needed to improve our nation’s immigration system. How we treat the marginalized in our society speaks volumes as to our commitment to the Great Commandment “to love your neighbor as yourself.” We are unanimous in our belief that all people, documented and undocumented must be treated humanely and justly. The need for humane, just and effective comprehensive immigration reform is now.

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