



## IMMIGRATION

### INTRODUCTION

One of the pressing issues facing our nation is the absence of a comprehensive and effective immigration policy in response to the unauthorized entry of millions of immigrants. To address this inaction at the federal level, state lawmakers across the country are attempting to halt or discourage illegal entry by enacting restrictive laws.

### CATHOLIC TEACHING ON IMMIGRATION

In migrants, Christians see the faces of Christ and his Holy Family, forced to flee their homeland into Egypt. No matter what their reason or matter of entry, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that, “Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance.” (*Caritas in veritate*, # 62)

Alongside this fundamental respect for the human rights of immigrants, the Church also recognizes the legitimate right of a state to control its borders for the common good. As the Church consistently teaches, these rights need not be opposed to one another, but rather they can and must complement one another. Internationally and in the United States, the Catholic Church repeatedly offers solutions to the problems engendered by migration.

In *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, a joint pastoral statement issued by the bishops of Mexico and the United States (2003), the bishops offer the following blueprint for immigration reform: 1) address the root causes of migration; 2) establish easier avenues for legal immigration (e.g., family-based, work-based); 3) legalize existing unauthorized immigrants; 4) follow humane enforcement policies; and 5) protect the human and legal rights of all migrants.

### WCC POSITIONS

The WCC opposes three proposals currently being circulated or under consideration by Wisconsin lawmakers.

**Detention for Determination of Immigrant Status.** In April 2010, Arizona became the first state to pass a law aimed at cooperating with the federal government to deport immigrants who cannot prove their legal status. Here in Wisconsin, a similar bill draft is circulating in the Assembly. The draft includes the following: 1) those suspected, arrested, or charged with a crime have to demonstrate that they are legally in Wisconsin; 2) they can be held in jail for up to 48 hours; 3) if they cannot prove legal presence in that time, they will be turned over to federal immigration authorities; 4) citizens can sue local governments for failure to enforce this law; 5) communities can be fined \$500 per day for noncompliance; 6) no local government can prevent enforcement by providing sanctuary; and 7) “illegal” immigrants will have a harder time accessing public benefits. The WCC opposes this proposal because in the name of upholding our nation’s laws it breaks up families, sows fear in immigrant communities, discourages immigrants from reporting crimes, and diverts law enforcement resources from more serious public safety issues.

**FoodShare Benefits for Legal Immigrants.** The state budget eliminates a provision in state law that provides food assistance to certain legal immigrants, known as “qualified aliens”. Unauthorized or “illegal aliens” do not qualify for federal food stamps or state FoodShare benefits. Since 1998, however, Wisconsin has provided FoodShare benefits to certain legal immigrants who do not qualify for federal food stamp benefits. These legal immigrants are individuals who are lawfully admitted for permanent residence, certain refugees or individuals granted asylum, certain individuals paroled for at least one year or granted conditional entry, or individuals whose deportation is being withheld. According to Wisconsin’s Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB), in January 2009, 863 individuals received an average monthly FoodShare benefit of \$82. The LFB estimates that the average recipient is in a household of four, with a monthly income of about 88 percent of the 2009 federal poverty level (\$1,838 per month for a family of four). The WCC opposes eliminating this benefit, which clearly assists some of the most vulnerable members of our community who reside in Wisconsin legally.

**Resident Tuition for Unauthorized Immigrants.** The state budget includes a provision to repeal a law enacted in 2009 that would allow unauthorized students to pay resident tuition at any University of Wisconsin school or technical college to which they are admitted, providing they meet certain criteria: 1) students must have graduated from a Wisconsin high school; 2) they must have lived in Wisconsin for three years prior to high school graduation; and 3) they must provide an affidavit stating that they will file an application for permanent residency as soon as they are able to do so.

The WCC supported the law’s enactment and opposes its repeal. Some argue that granting in-state tuition to undocumented students simply rewards illegal behavior. However, this presupposes that children have a choice about where their families live and where they go to school. Moreover, we do not deny these same immigrant children access to a K-12 education in our public schools. By extension, if these immigrant students complete high school and take the steps necessary to gain admission to a UW-system school, they should be charged the same tuition as their peers who are citizens or legal residents. If we want immigrants to fully acculturate and legalize their status, providing them with affordable higher education is one of the most effective and efficient ways to do so.

## **ACTION REQUESTED**

Write or call your legislator and make the following points:

1. Oppose jail detention for determination of immigrant status and similar immigration laws.
2. Oppose eliminating FoodShare benefits for legal immigrants.
3. Oppose repealing UW resident tuition for unauthorized immigrants.

*The USCCB has extensive resources on its website [www.justiceforimmigrants.org](http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org), or contact Barbara Sella at 608/257-0004.*