



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

GRADYE PARSONS
STATED CLERK

February 10, 2015

Dear Members of Congress,

I write to you today on behalf of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to express concern about H.R. 399, Secure Our Borders First Act of 2015.

For years there has been bipartisan agreement that our nation's immigration laws are in need of reform. This notion is well-founded in fact with backlogs in family-based immigration more than twenty years long¹ and hundreds of persons perishing along our southern border each year.² Yet session after session, year after year no relief is forthcoming. The explanation for this inaction is always the same:

“We must secure our borders first.”

At first blush this premise seems reasonable but, in truth, it is immoral as it denies the value and dignity of the persons swept up in its grasp. In the name of border security this country has created Operation Streamline, built hundreds of miles of fence, created family detention centers, expedited removals, and doubled the size of customs and border protection. This country has bound up “heavy burdens, hard to bear, and [laid] them on the shoulders of [migrant men, women, and children]”³ in the name of justice and rule of law all the while acknowledging that the law we are so stridently protecting is so deeply broken.

The human lives caught up in this border security strategy are mothers and fathers, workers, church members, and long-time residents of the United States.⁴ In our faith tradition, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. It is the greatest commandment of all, second only to loving our God.⁵ What, then, would I want if a border separated me from my child, my job, my faith community, the place I considered home? What would I be willing to do to be reunited with the life I had created and the people whom I love?⁶ This years-long strategy of enforcement alone turns a blind eye to the misery it creates. It neglects mercy and denies our common humanity. It creates criminals of parents and workers whom are just trying to get back to the place they call home in order to parent and work. Even worse, it sometimes kills parents and workers forced to trust coyotes and forced to cross in the most dangerous regions of our southern border.

Securing our borders first is further immoral as it is a moving target that changes with each administration and every session of Congress. In 2011, former Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano declared our border was secure, yet relief did not follow.⁷ Now the truth we have all feared has come to light in the language of H.R. 399; a secure border is a perfect border. One in which “operational control” must be achieved and maintained and “operational control” is defined as, “the prevention of all unlawful entries into the United States, including entries

by terrorists, other unlawful aliens, instruments of terrorism, narcotics, and other contraband.”⁸ The veil of rationality within the demand to “secure our borders first” is lifted with that definition and the truth is revealed. No level of border security will ever satisfy those that have proffered their support of this bill.

Members of Congress, I implore you to search your hearts. I am certain that the majority of you do not want what this bill requires. I assure you, your constituents do not want what this bill requires. Please oppose H.R. 399 and stop proposing security strategy after security strategy while turning a blind eye to the 11 million who are so desperate for the meaningful relief that only comprehensive immigration reform can afford.

In Christ,



The Reverend Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of
The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

¹ <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/law-and-policy/bulletin/2015/visa-bulletin-for-february-2015.html>.

² <http://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USBP%20Stats%20FY2014%20sector%20profile.pdf>.

³ Matthew 23:4.

⁴ <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/unauthorized-immigrants-today-demographic-profile>.

⁵ Matthew 22:36–40.

⁶ http://las.arizona.edu/sites/las.arizona.edu/files/UA_Immigration_Report2013web.pdf.

⁷ <http://www.dhs.gov/news/2011/10/05/secretary-napolitanos-remarks-smart-effective-border-security-and-immigration>.

⁸ 8 U.S.C. 1701 note.