

## **Outline of General Assembly Policy related to Comprehensive Immigration Reform**

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has issued statements and created policy on immigration for many years. Below are just a few of the General Assembly's recent statements on immigration reform organized according to the major provisions of the *Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act* (S.B. 744).

### **Pathway to Citizenship**

- Establishment of a comprehensive legalization program for undocumented persons already living and working in the United States - 216th General Assembly (2004)
- Create an opportunity for hard-working immigrants who are already contributing to this country to come out of the shadows, regularize their status upon satisfaction of reasonable criteria, and over time, pursue an option to become lawful permanent residents and U.S. citizens - 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2006)

### **The DREAM Act**

- Passage of the DREAM Act - 220th General Assembly (2012)

### **Border**

- Border protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing authorities to carry out the critical task of identifying and prevent entry of terrorists and dangerous criminals – 217th General Assembly (2006)

### **Internal Enforcement**

- Greater use of alternative to detention - 220th General Assembly (2012)
- Address the indiscriminate deportation of hundreds of thousands of persons through the merger of the criminal justice system and Immigration and Customs Enforcement - 220th General Assembly (2012)

### **Family**

- Reform current immigration policies and procedures to ensure a more timely and humane process, with special attention to family reunification - 216th General Assembly (2004)
- Reduce wait times for families to be reunited - 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2006)

### **Backlogs**

- Reform of current immigration policies with special attention to those persons who have been waiting for their immigrant visas - 216th General Assembly (2004)
- Reform family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting times for separated families who currently wait many hears to be reunited - 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2006)

## **Integration**

- Recognition that often people are fearful and insecure of entering into new friendships and the need of prayer, Biblical reflection, and encounters with newcomers in order to form a new community in Christ - 211th General Assembly (1999)
- Call the church to a time of “Being church together” in our worship and as a community - 220th General Assembly (2012)
- Facilitate integration of immigrants into communities by celebrating the culture and languages of homelands, providing civics education and legal assistance to regularize their status - 220th General Assembly (2012)

## **Future Flow**

- Creation of legal avenues for workers and their families who wish to migrate to the U.S. to enter and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights fully protected – 217th General Assembly (2006)
- Provide safe, legal, and realistic paths for future migration, consistent with the needs of the U.S. economy without undercutting the employment of those already present in the U.S. 220th General Assembly (2012)

There are many other provisions of the legislation that are in-line with General Assembly policy, including: improvements to detention standards, better treatment for adopted and stepchildren in the immigration process, improvements to the refugee/asylee program, and investments in the immigration court system.

SB 744 will head to the full Senate for debate in June 2013. Presbyterians are urged to contact their Senators and encourage them to support comprehensive immigration reform that has a pathway to citizenship, eliminates back logs, provides a commonsense plan for future flow, avoids the militarization of our southern border, and provides for humane enforcement.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has affirmed the right of congregations, presbyteries, and the denomination as a whole, to speak out clearly and constantly to the media and others regarding our call to serve all those in need and to stand with the oppressed. (217th General Assembly 2006). If you have questions about how to share your faith in the public square, please see the resources below.

- Comprehensive Immigration Reform Tool Kit from the office of Immigration Issues website to learn how to involve your community in the movement to seek justice for aspiring Americans. Available in English and Spanish: [www.pcusa.org/immigration](http://www.pcusa.org/immigration).
- The office of Public Witness has created a packet to assist Presbyterians in contracting their elected representatives and can be downloaded at [http://www.presbyterianmission.org/media/uploads/compassion-peace-justice/pdf/holy\\_discontentment\\_advocacy\\_resource\\_final.pdf](http://www.presbyterianmission.org/media/uploads/compassion-peace-justice/pdf/holy_discontentment_advocacy_resource_final.pdf).
- Interfaith Immigration Coalition is a tool kit for visits with your congressional representatives: [http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/IIC\\_NEIGHBOR\\_to\\_NEIGHBOR\\_Toolkit\\_01.pdf](http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/IIC_NEIGHBOR_to_NEIGHBOR_Toolkit_01.pdf).



PRESBYTERIANS FOR  
JUST IMMIGRATION

## Immigration Reform Debate and General Assembly Policy

Many times the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has voiced concern about the need for change in our nation's immigration policy. The General Assembly has called for changes that will meet the needs of our country and our families. The need for reform is rooted in our rediscovery of ourselves as the church of the stranger, the biblical mandate to welcome and love immigrants, and the need to alleviate the suffering created by an unjust system.

While recognizing the right and responsibility of U.S. to maintain our country's borders, the General Assembly has expressed concern about the militarization of our nation's southern border and the human toll of a policy that focuses primarily on enforcement. Further, the General Assembly has lifted up civil and human rights violations in the border and internal enforcement policies of the United States. The General Assembly has stated that enforcement policies should comport with notions of due process and aim to reduce human smuggling and migrant deaths.

In November 2012 eight Senators, four democrats and four republicans, began work on comprehensive immigration reform to modernize our nation's immigration policy. Known as "The Gang of 8," the Senators introduced legislation in April 2013, *Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act* (S.B. 744), and that legislation has gone through an amendment process in the Senate Judiciary Committee. It will be debated in the full Senate in June 2013.

Below is an outline of major provisions of the legislation and how it fits in with General Assembly policy.

- **A pathway to citizenship for people already working and living in the U.S.**
  - Individuals in the U.S. without authorization would be able to apply for Registered Provisional Immigrant (RPI) status, which if eligible and granted, would give people authorization to work and remain in the country. After 10 years in RPI status, these individuals could apply for lawful permanent residence status (LPR). After three years in LPR status they could apply for citizenship.
  - This process is accompanied by "triggers." No one could apply for RPI status until a border enforcement and maintenance plan is created and implemented. No person in RPI status could apply for LPR status until all people in the "back logs" have received their "green card."
  - Individuals applying for status under this plan would pay a fine, learn English and Civics, and have to prove fulfillment of tax obligations.
  - There are numerous other provisions and eligibility requirements too detailed for this handout, see below for additional information.

- **The DREAM Act**
  - This provision would offer a shorter pathway to citizenship and an exemption to penalty fines to people brought to the U.S. as children.
  - DREAMers would have to fulfill requirements related to education or military service to remain eligible under this provision
- **Some positive family immigration changes**
  - Spouses and minor children of LPR are re-classified as immediate relatives so they can immediately be reunited as opposed to waiting 2-7 years under current law.
- **Reduction in backlogs**
  - Recapturing unused visas from prior years
  - Increasing per country caps from 7% to 15%
- **Integration of new immigrants**
  - Creates a Task Force on New Americans
  - Renames and expands the duties of the Office of Citizenship to help immigrants integrate
  - Establishes a foundation to provide resources to programs assisting New Americans
- **Future Flow**
  - Creates new avenues to lawfully enter the U.S. for individuals who may not have options under current law
  - Use of unemployment data to increase/decrease non-immigrant visas according to needs of economy and employers

Even though the legislation is in-line with the General Assembly policy, overall, there are some changes needed. The office of Immigration Issues will work in partnership with our interfaith partners to improve the legislation.

- The cut off date of January 1, 2012 for U.S. presence for gaining status
- Lengthy process Ten years in RPI status plus three in LPR for citizenship
- Family unity changes: elimination of category V – siblings of USC and caps adult children to under 31
- Continued build up at the border in the form of agents, fence, and use of drones

For more detailed analysis, please explore the resources below

- Migration Policy Institute: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/CIRbrief-2013SenateBill-Side-by-Side.pdf>
- Immigration Policy Center: <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/comprehensive-immigration-reform-2013>
- Alliance for Citizenship (many resources in English and Spanish): <http://allianceforcitizenship.org/>
- Review General Assembly policy at [www.pcusa.org/immigration](http://www.pcusa.org/immigration)

Office of Immigration Issues \* Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

[Melissa.davis@pcusa.org](mailto:Melissa.davis@pcusa.org) or 502-569-5007

[www.pcusa.org/immigration](http://www.pcusa.org/immigration)