



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

September 27, 2013

Dear Members of the House of Representatives:

Greetings and thank you for your service to our country. Despite media reports forecasting little likelihood of movement on immigration legislation, I am hopeful for a just and compassionate immigration reform this year, and so are many Presbyterians. As a pastor and denominational leader, I have been a witness to the effects that our broken immigration system has on many. Because of this suffering, I have come to understand that immigration is a spiritual and pastoral care issue.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has adopted policy calling on Presbyterians across the country to advocate for a comprehensive reform. The current U.S. policy of enforcement through a build up at our borders has led to an increase in deaths and placed tremendous stress on border communities. Our internal enforcement policies are responsible for separating families through deportation and pushing many more families to the margins of our society. I believe that we can have immigration reform that does not criminalize or place in harm's way those seeking the American Dream.

I urge you to oppose the Strengthen and Fortify Enforcement Act (HR 2278). This piece of legislation is not "safe," as its name implies, but rather, it will increase discrimination and oppression of people based on their perceived immigration status. My heart breaks at the stories of Presbyterians and others who have been so intimidated by law enforcement that they are too cautious to attend worship services. While these reports have decreased over the last few years, HR 2278 would create an environment of suspicion and oppression and criminalize those who are in violation of our nation's civil immigration laws.

In addition to criminalizing some immigrant families, this law would also criminalize residents and citizens who minister to their undocumented brothers and sisters by providing material support and care. HR 2278 is the wrong direction for our country.

I hope that you will oppose this legislation and work across the aisle to come up with a just immigration reform that provides a pathway to citizenship for those already working and living in the US, creates opportunities for future legal immigration, reduces or eliminates the backlogs in immigration, and reforms enforcement policies so that they comport with notions of due process and respect human rights. Our country deserves better than HR 2278 and I believe Congress can lead us to that space.

In Christ,

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