

National Organization for Women

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Dear Senator,

NOW's bottom line for *all* people is that they be treated fairly and with respect and that their hard work is recognized and their families thrive. The current debate around legislation dealing with immigration and undocumented workers undermines this basic premise. **Congress must not support an immigration bill that builds walls and prisons, separates families and promotes fear and that does not provide a path to permanent residency and citizenship.**

Please do not promote nor vote for any legislation that fails to provide a path to citizenship and improved working conditions and does not preserve existing Violence Against Women Act provisions that relate to immigrant families.

While the Senate bill is being heralded as the best measure possible to come out of a bad bargain, it contains many flaws that are inconsistent with the values and goals of our country. The Senate bill is an improvement over the punitive H.R.4437 passed by the House of Representatives last December (that version makes undocumented presence in the country a *felony*), but the Senate legislation falls short in many areas: increased fees and penalties; reduction in the number of legal temporary workers; and making residency more difficult. In order to obtain documents for legal residency, immigrants will have to meet requirements that are now only necessary for those applying for citizenship (such as English proficiency and a civics test).

Although the Senate bill makes a good faith attempt to provide a "path to citizenship," which the U.S. has historically offered to immigrants, it sets up an awkward and almost unworkable three-tiered system to determine eligibility for citizenship. The bill would require deportation of undocumented immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for less than two years; would force those who have been here for between two and five years to leave the country and reapply for entry, putting them at the "end of the line" and thus lengthening the time that they will have to be away from families and jobs. This system, which by many accounts would be almost impossible to implement and monitor, would separate families, continue to keep undocumented people in the shadows and would create an atmosphere of fear among the undocumented immigrant communities.

Please focus on the positive aspects of the Senate bill that offer potential for reform rather than cruelty. The bill recognizes the value of the work of our undocumented population and provides many more legal opportunities for family unification and for immigrants coming here to work.

- Legalization program: An estimated 8 to 8.5 million undocumented immigrants will be able to come out of the shadows and be put on a path to permanent residence.
- AgJOBS included: A million undocumented agricultural workers would be put on a path to permanent residence through provisions targeted to these workers.

- DREAM included: Undocumented immigrant students will be put on a path to citizenship and will be able to continue on to college along with their classmates.
- Significant increase in family visas: The family-based immigration system will be updated to speed family unification. Clearing the backlog for family unification will take approximately six years.
- Significant increase in employment visas: Employment-based visas are more than doubled to more realistically allow immigrants to come legally in the future to work.
- A new temporary worker program: The bill provides temporary visas to allow 200,000 persons to come legally each year and take jobs that are not being filled by American workers. This program includes worker protections, gives workers the ability to change employers, and provides a path to permanent residence for those who want to stay.

NOW 's opposition to the punitive measures in current immigration bills stems from our nation's basic commitment to equal opportunity, civil rights and human decency principles. Immigration is very much an issue that affects women, as more than half of the almost 12 million undocumented immigrants are women and children. Immigrant women are among the most vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and human rights violations in the United States. They face particular challenges due to inequalities that exist between men and women but also due to the additional responsibilities of family and home. In the workplace, immigrant women may be subjected to gender discrimination as well as prejudice based on their accent, ethnicity or country of birth. Some women come to the U.S. to be domestic workers or caregivers, working for substandard wages, living in the shadows; many of them leave their own children in their native country to be raised by relatives while they work in the U.S. to try to raise their own families out of poverty. Providing a way for these women to become legal workers in the United States would improve their lives and the lives of their families through better paying jobs with benefits and eventual family reunification.

Current legislation fails to look at the negative impact of trade agreements such as NAFTA and CAFTA, as well as policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. By many accounts, these have resulted in creating neither economic growth nor jobs south of the border, but rather have exacerbated the poverty and have increased the wealth of the multi-nationals benefiting from those agreements.

Our call to you and this nation is for fair reform that doesn't make felons out of undocumented immigrants and the people and institutions that provide services to them — reform that doesn't build walls or promote hatred, vigilante tactics and servitude. Instead, it must address economic policies that exacerbate the poverty in other countries, and value the work and contributions of immigrants working and raising families here. The majority of immigrants come to this country in search of a better life, in search of an opportunity to work and prosper. This has been the story of immigration in the United States and continues to be. This country was built on the backs of immigrants from all over the world, including those coming from our neighbors to the South. Please join us in our nation's commitment to fairness and decency.

Sincerely,



President