

February 26, 2009

RE: Support for H.R. 1215, the Immigration Oversight and Fairness Act of 2009

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned faith, human rights, civil liberties, refugee and immigrant, and community organizations urge you to support H.R. 1215, the Immigration Oversight and Fairness Act of 2009, sponsored by Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA). This bill would implement critically needed reforms to our failing immigration detention system and reclaim America's standing as a welcoming and just nation that accords everyone dignity and respect.

In recent years, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has dramatically increased the use of punitive enforcement measures, including jail-like detention, against noncitizens. In 2008, more than 300,000 people were placed in detention, and on any given day over 30,000 people were locked up. The federal government's efforts to apprehend, detain and deport non-citizens is sowing fear in our communities and tearing families apart. Many who are detained pose no threat to the community or public safety, and they include vulnerable populations such as asylum seekers, torture survivors, children, pregnant women, families with minor children and the elderly.

The Immigration Oversight and Fairness Act of 2009 could not have come at a more critical time. In 2008, *60 Minutes*, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* reported on the substandard medical care in immigration detention facilities. More reports of deaths in detention and poor practices came out this year. Indeed at least 80 people died while in DHS detention during a 5-year period beginning in 2003. Some of those deaths, such as the case of Francisco Castaneda who died of cancer after his pleas for medical care went ignored for months, likely could have been prevented if adequate treatment were provided. Audits conducted in 2007 by DHS's Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office revealed that DHS's system for monitoring detention conditions is deficient. Additionally, the bipartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom found, in a study requested by Congress, that U.S. asylum seekers are detained under "inappropriate" and "jail-like conditions."

Our nation should provide safe and humane detention conditions for anyone detained, and this bill accomplishes that by requiring the government to implement clear and enforceable standards. Specifically, the legislation would improve detainees' access to telephones and medical care, including treatment for sexual abuse survivors. Proper mental health care is even more critical for those who have suffered persecution, torture and other trauma, and are at grave risk while in confinement.

The federal government's increased use of immigration detention costs taxpayers nearly \$2 billion per year. In response to these escalating costs, H.R. 1215 would promote alternatives to detention programs that would enable vulnerable detainees and others to be released into the community on their own recognizance, bond, or through non-custodial supervision programs that are more humane and cost a fraction of the price of incarceration. The bill would save taxpayers millions of dollars and allow men and women to return to their families and communities while they go through the immigration processing system.

Lastly, the Immigration Oversight and Fairness Act of 2009 provides protections for unaccompanied children who are taken into DHS custody and endure horrible conditions at stations along the border. Internal DHS protocols state that children should have access to food and water as well as appropriate shelter while in DHS custody. Despite these guidelines, a disturbing number of children report dehumanizing treatment, inadequate food and bedding, lack of emergency medical care and deprivations of basic due process. This bill would improve general protections for this vulnerable group, enhance training for DHS officials to ensure they treat children properly and facilitate the speedy transfer of children to better-equipped shelter facilities.

We urge you to support this legislation to restore this nation's commitment to humanitarian values, due process, civil liberties and human rights, to ensure immigrant detainees are treated humanely, to expand the use of community-based alternatives to detention and other release options, and to protect vulnerable children. The federal government's skyrocketing use of detention is having a devastating impact on our children, families and communities and is undermining this country's commitment to provide refuge to victims of persecution. The Immigration Oversight and Fairness Act of 2009 makes great strides in improving this faltering detention system.

Sincerely,

**NATIONAL**

The Advocates for Human Rights  
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)  
American Humane Association  
American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA)  
American Jewish Committee  
Amnesty International USA  
Asian American Justice Center (AAJC)  
Bill of Rights Defense Committee  
Chaldean Federation of America  
Church World Service, Immigration and Refugee Program  
Coalition for Irish Immigration Centers  
The Episcopal Church  
Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc.  
First Focus Campaign for Children  
Franciscan Action Network  
Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)  
General Commission on Religion and Race, United Methodist Church  
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)  
Human Rights First  
Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC)  
Immigration Equality  
Irish Apostolate USA  
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
Leadership Council on Civil Rights  
League of United National Latin American Citizens  
Legal Momentum  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS)  
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund

Muslim Advocates  
National Council on La Raza (NCLR)  
National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON)  
National Immigration Forum  
National Immigrant Justice Center  
National Immigration Law Center  
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)  
National Network for Arab American Communities  
National Organization for Women  
OneAmerica  
Physicians for Human Rights  
Rights Working Group  
Sikh Council on Religion and Education  
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)  
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)  
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations  
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society  
General Commission on Religion and Race, United Methodist Church  
Women's Refugee Commission  
World Organization for Human Rights

## **LOCAL/STATE/REGIONAL**

### **Arizona**

The Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project

### **Border Region**

Border Network for Human Rights

### **California**

All Saints Episcopal Church-Pasadena, Immigration Task Force  
Asian Law Alliance  
Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California  
California Church IMPACT  
Central American Resource Center, Los Angeles  
The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA)  
Korean Resource Center (KRC), Los Angeles, CA  
L.A. Community Legal Center and Educational  
Lutheran Office of Public Policy – California  
Marin Interfaith Worker Justice  
Progressive Jewish Alliance, California  
Public Counsel

### **Florida**

Honduran Unity-Unidad Hondurena  
Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center (FIAC)

### **Georgia**

Latinos for Education & Justice Org., Inc.

**Illinois**

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
Korean American Resource & Cultural Center (KRCC), Chicago, IL  
Lutheran Social Services of Illinois and Lutheran Advocacy—Illinois

**Massachusetts**

Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA)

**Michigan**

Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services

**Mississippi**

El Pueblo

**Nebraska**

Justice and Advocacy Ministries, ELCA-NE

**New Jersey**

First Friends  
International Institute of New Jersey  
IRATE  
Ironbound Community Corporation  
Grupo Cajola en Morristown, NJ  
Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry in New Jersey  
Mujeres Unidas por Nuestros Derechos MUND (Women United for our Rights)  
NJ Immigrant Policy Network  
Pax Christi NJ  
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network of NJ

**New Mexico**

Immaculate Conception Church  
Jesuit Community of Immaculate Conception Church  
Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-New Mexico

**New York**

Arab American Family Support Center  
Journey's End Refugee Services, Inc.  
Judson Memorial Church, New York City  
Long Island Immigrant Alliance  
Lutheran Statewide Advocacy (New York)  
New Sanctuary Movement, New York City  
New York Episcopal Public Policy Network  
New York Immigration Coalition

**North Carolina**

FaithAction International House

**Northeast Region**

Lutheran Social Services of New England

**Northwest Region**

Northwest Federation of Community Organizations (Washington)

**Ohio**

St. Mary Hispanic Ministry, Marion

**Pennsylvania**

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa)

Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Philadelphia Arab American Community Development Corporation

**Rhode Island**

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Open Table of Christ United Methodist Church

Zion Korean United Methodist Church

**South and Midwest Region**

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, South Central Community

**Texas**

Paso del Norte Civil Rights Project, El Paso, TX

**Virginia**

Tahirih Justice Center

**Washington**

Washington Community Action Network

Washington Defender Association's Immigration Project

**Wisconsin**

La Causa, Inc.

St. Norbert Abbey Justice and Peace Committee