

///Rapid Response



November 17, 2011

TAKE ACTION!

Urge the Department of Homeland Security to exercise greater discretion in the deportation of immigrants.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Please consider signing on to an interfaith letter to Secretary Janet Napolitano (see below) that urges the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to exercise discretion concerning the deportation of immigrants-to evaluate the totality of the circumstances in each individual case, including cases involving immigrants who at one time in their lives had been convicted of a crime.

Many immigrants with long-ago convictions have since had clean records, started families, and become model members of their congregations and communities. They pose no risk to public safety and therefore should fall outside the agency's enforcement priorities. To categorically deny them the possibility of discretion runs counter to the understanding of redemption, forgiveness, human growth, and reconciliation held by many Christians and shared by many people of faith in other religious traditions.

Consider the case of Julia Casares from Queens, NY who suffered a miscarriage last month as she was about to be deported to Ecuador because of a ten-year old shoplifting conviction. Julia has a partner, two U.S. citizen children and four U.S. citizen siblings. But it wasn't until she lost her baby while in ICE custody that officials decided to allow her to stay. Had it not been for that long-ago conviction, it is likely that Julia would never have had to endure this tragedy. An appropriate discretion policy might well have prevented it.

Please show your support for Julia and many other immigrants by signing this interfaith letter asking DHS to exercise discretion by considering the individual factors in all cases, including in those cases involving prior criminal history.

Please sign on by COB on Friday, November 18.

Reply to disciplescenter@verizon.net. Please include: name, title and affiliation, if any; city and state; and indicate whether you are signing as an individual or on behalf of your ministry or organization.

We encourage you to circulate this email and letter to friends and colleagues, and we thank you in advance for your support of this effort.

LETTER TO SECRETARY NAPOLITANO

Dear Secretary Napolitano:

We are faith leaders from across the United States, representing a broad range of America's faith traditions. We write in a spirit of gratitude and collaboration as the Obama Administration and the Department of Homeland Security develop guidelines for the new policy announced this past August that supports increased prosecutorial discretion in the deportation of immigrants.

We are deeply thankful that certain immigrants who have family and other ties within the United States and its communities will be recognized for the productive, non-threatening people they are, and may benefit from an exercise of discretion. This is an important step along the road to just and humane immigration reform, and is an example of the commitment to justice and fairness that immigration communities had been led to anticipate from President Obama and members of his administration.

We write now to urge that immigrants with prior convictions not be categorically excluded from consideration for an exercise of discretion. We are all sensitive to and concerned about the safety needs of our communities, and therefore do not seek to forestall all deportations of immigrants with prior convictions. However, we are also deeply aware of the many people in our communities, both immigrants and citizens, who have been convicted of crimes and have gone on to contribute to their communities and live fruitful, productive lives. Many immigrants in this category are long-time lawful permanent residents and have citizen spouses and children. Some have become leaders in their communities. We believe that those who have strong family and community ties, and who are productive members of society, should be eligible for an exercise of discretion that will allow them to remain in the United States.

To exclude immigrants with prior convictions from the possibility of benefiting from prosecutorial discretion goes against all that we in the faith community understand about redemption, forgiveness, human growth, and reconciliation. In addition, it exposes those who have "paid" for their convictions through an experience of incarceration to a kind of double jeopardy of punishment. Such a practice runs contrary not only to widely-shared principles of faith, but also to American principles of justice and human rights.

We make our recommendation mindful of the need among us for hope and safety, as well as the protection of family and community ties wherever it is possible to protect them, and ultimately, for an immigration system that is realistic, just and humane.

Very truly yours,

[Your signature and information]

Again: Please sign on by COB on Friday, November 18 by replying to disciplescenter@verizon.net. Please include: name, title and affiliation, if any; city and state; and indicate whether you are signing as an individual or on behalf of your ministry or organization.

[Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Langston](#), Ph. D.

Director, [Disciples Center for Public Witness](#)

Director, [Disciples Justice Action Network](#) (DJAN)

Co-Convener, [Disciples Advocacy & Witness Network](#) (DAWN)
