

## Four Essential Principles for Immigration Reform

To meet the needs of migrants and of America, meaningful reform must include four principles:

- uniting families;
- protecting human rights and worker rights;
- ending the marginalization of the undocumented, making it possible for those working “below the radar” to live freely and openly in our society;
- and giving immigrants willing to contribute to our economy and society a path toward citizenship.

**Uniting families**—Family unity has always been a cornerstone of U.S. immigration policy and of advocacy of many faith-based groups. LIRS’s “advocacy will continue to insist that family reunification should be the primary objective of immigration laws.” (3) Currently, undocumented people who are doing vital jobs in our communities rarely have a viable legal avenue to obtain immigration papers for themselves and their families. Even documented immigrants and refugees often have only protracted means to unite with their families. The current backlog of family preference visas, for example, makes U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents wait up to 20 years to reunite with their families. (4) Comprehensive immigration reform can ensure that family unity policy is strengthened, both for undocumented people who receive earned adjustment and for those already in the system.

**Protecting rights**—Migrant workers experience lower wages, exploitative labor practices and dangerous working conditions, and live in constant fear and insecurity. Providing legal documents for honest, hardworking migrants would discourage such abuses of human rights and worker rights.

**Ending marginalization**—While the United States has the sovereign responsibility to control its borders, it must also create migration policies consistent with its constitutional and humanitarian values. By bringing people out of the shadows of marginalization, our immigrant communities can live in the light of day, able to contribute more freely. Moreover, by better documenting who is in our country, we can strive for smart enforcement, fair proceedings, efficient processing and targeted enforcement against those who want to harm us.

**Providing a path to permanence**—Reform will provide earned adjustment, a

path to permanent status for certain current and future workers who are patient and work hard. It acknowledges the integral part they already play in our society and enables them to participate and contribute even more fully.

### **McCain-Kennedy Legislation Promises Comprehensive Reform**

The bipartisan McCain-Kennedy comprehensive immigration reform legislation has the following features that would go a long way to fulfilling the principles described above:

- A worker visa program allowing orderly legal migration of essential workers in the future
- An earned adjustment program for certain current undocumented workers
- Family unity provisions for certain workers
- A path toward permanent status for current and future workers who are patient and work hard
- Special protection for certain widows and orphans

### **H.R. 4437 Threatens the Most Vulnerable Migrants and Service Providers**

The most vulnerable among the undocumented immigrants and refugees are those that LIRS holds most dear: unaccompanied children, women at risk, asylum seekers, torture survivors and families. In addition to criminalizing church workers and others who assist them, the legislation would

- turn them into criminals because they are “out of status”;
- deprive them of federal court review—an essential safeguard that ensures that deportation is proper (e.g., that this country does not mistakenly deport refugees back into the hands of their persecutors);
- increase their detention, even though the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has concluded that asylum seekers are jailed in inappropriate facilities; and
- bar refugees from asylum because they are out of status or fled to the United States using false travel documents.

### **Footnotes**

(3) Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, ["A Message on Immigration,"](#) 1998.

(4) Congressional Research Service, ["U.S. Immigration Policy on Permanent Admissions,"](#) February 2004, page 11.