



February 7, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C., 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C., 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jefferies
Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C., 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C., 20510

Dear Speaker Johnson, Leader Jefferies, Leader Schumer, and Leader McConnell:

I am writing on behalf of Catholic Charities USA and the Catholic Charities network to urge bipartisan compromise on the pressing issue of immigration. CCUSA applauds the effort to put forth the Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2024 to address the humanitarian crisis at the southern border and the challenges within the U.S. immigration system. While achieving a complete overhaul of the system may seem unattainable at the moment, I ask you to collaborate and address specific provisions that will have an immediate impact on border communities, interior communities, and vulnerable immigrants who seek refuge and a better life in this country.

The immigration debate is complex, and there are differing viewpoints within Congress. However, as leaders entrusted with the responsibility to serve your constituents, your inaction on immigration is causing great human suffering and disruptions in service infrastructures at the border and throughout the country. We will continue to serve those in need as our ministry and faith call us to do, but without Congressional action, families will continue to be torn apart, communities and local charitable agencies such as our own will be left to manage the federal issue of immigration with insufficient federal support, and federal government agencies will continue to experience operational challenges.

Therefore, I implore you to urgently agree on a few immigration issues to make small, long-overdue progress on this matter. I ask you to pass a bill on the following issues immediately:

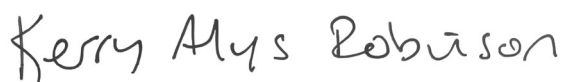
1. Provide the proposed \$3.99 billion for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). As you know, USCIS relies almost entirely on fees collected from applications for its operations, and without more funding from Congress, the agency lacks adequate resources to hire more staff and acquire the tools necessary for reducing the backlog of immigration benefit requests.
2. Provide the proposed \$440 million to hire additional immigration judges and to increase the capacity of the immigration courts to expeditiously process and adjudicate cases. Study shows immigration judges now average about 4,500 cases each. This method of administering justice in our immigration legal process is inefficient and unsustainable.

3. Provide funding for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and related agencies to investigate and combat human trafficking and other forms of exploitation targeting vulnerable U.S. citizens and non-citizens.
4. Expedite employment authorization eligibility for asylum seekers from 180 days to 30 after filing their application, as noted in the bill, to enable them to support themselves, fill jobs in industries that desperately need workers, and contribute financially to their communities, while they continue their immigration legal process.
5. Funding for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is critical to support their operational needs and acquire advanced technology to protect our borders and enforce our immigration laws. In addition, please invest more funding in Alternatives to Detention (ATDs) programs rather than detention expansion, as ATDs have been proven to yield better outcomes. As ICE puts it, ATDs “increase court appearance rates... with absconder rates dropping dramatically [over the years].” ATD is a cost-effective option. The daily cost per participant is under \$8, while detention costs around \$150 per day.
6. Provide Permanent Resident status without conditions for our Afghan allies who remain uncertain about their future in this country. They provided invaluable support to U.S. missions in Afghanistan and were rigorously vetted by U.S. authorities during their parole process before relocating to this country. I implore you to give them the stability and security they need to forge ahead.
7. Provide the funding for sheltering and related humanitarian assistance to assist border and interior communities that welcome immigrants being released from DHS custody.

When Congress is at an impasse on taking meaningful action on immigration, there is no positive outcome for the government at all levels, receiving communities, and newcomers. Please set aside partisan differences and find common ground on the urgent issues raised above. Your failure to act perpetuates human suffering, further divides our nation, and undermines our country's values of compassion.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. CCUSA and its member agencies stand ready to support immigrants and your good-faith efforts to achieve a bipartisan compromise on immigration reform.

Sincerely,



Ms. Kerry Alys Robinson
President & CEO
Catholic Charities USA