

**Statement of Bishop John Wester of Salt Lake City  
Chairman, U.S. Bishops' Committee on Communications  
April 22, 2013**

Thank you. I would like to speak to the issue of enforcement and the church's position.

First, let me point out that our nation has spent billions of dollars (some estimate as much as \$150 billion) on immigration enforcement over the past ten years, yet the undocumented population has increased from 6-7 million to 11 million since 2000. So, we are pleased that Congress is taking a more comprehensive approach that would increase legal avenues for migrants to enter our nation safely and securely.

We have concerns with what are called border "triggers," actions that must be implemented before undocumented persons can apply for permanent residency. Any border implementation strategy, fence strategy, and the implementation of an e-verify system must include components which protect basic human rights and prevent deaths in the desert. We also are wary of provisions which increase criminal penalties for undocumented persons, including the expansion of Operation Streamline, which prosecutes migrants as criminals. It is wrong to view migrants who come to work and support their families as criminals.

We also believe that if these security goals prove to be impossible to attain, the undocumented will be kept from obtaining a green card indefinitely, creating a "de facto" permanent underclass. The enforcement initiatives and the ability to adjust to permanent status should be de-linked, so that all aspects of the bill move forward simultaneously. Otherwise, the issue of whether these immigrants can adjust their status will remain a divisive political issue in the years to come.

I would point out that the bill does not address the root causes of migration, an important part of the church's position. As a global actor, the church witnesses firsthand why persons migrate—to escape poverty and persecution. These factors that push people to emigrate must be part of the debate. Instead of constructing border walls, we should examine our economic policies and adjust them so that living wage jobs are not eliminated in sending communities. Persons have a right to remain in their homes and live in dignity. This is the long-term and humane answer to the challenge of irregular migration.

As communications chair, I would also mention that Catholics are with the bishops on this important issue of immigration. We released a survey on Friday, conducted by the Tarrance Group, that shows that 77 percent of Catholics—from across the political spectrum—support a path to citizenship. There are other interesting findings from the survey, which I encourage you to look at.

Finally, I call upon all sides to conduct the immigration debate in a civil and respectful manner. Too often in previous debates, migrants have been de-humanized by the rhetoric in the debate, called "illegals" and other labels. As a nation, we are improving in this area, no doubt, but name-calling and labeling has no place in the political discourse of our great nation.