

Pastoral Care of Immigrants & Refugees

USCCB Fact Sheet

National and local Catholic charitable agencies around the country have long provided services to people in need, regardless of immigration status. However, several states have passed laws that forbid **what state legislatures consider “harboring”** of undocumented immigrants—and **what the Church considers Christian charity and pastoral care** to those immigrants.

In Alabama, for example, the Catholic bishops, in cooperation with the Episcopal and Methodist bishops of Alabama, filed suit against a law prohibiting “harboring” of undocumented immigrants. Together, they explained that the “law makes illegal the exercise of our Christian religion which we, as citizens of Alabama, have a right to follow.” They expressed concern that laws prohibiting “harboring” (when there is knowledge or reckless disregard of the fact that persons are undocumented immigrants) would substantially burden their churches in their mission to serve undocumented immigrants.

The law would have a chilling effect on their ministries—among other things, these church leaders feared that the prohibition on “harboring” would extend to activities like “encourag[ing immigrants] to attend Mass or giv[ing] them a ride to Mass;” “counsel[ing] them in times of difficulty or in preparation for marriage;” and inviting “them to come to Alcoholic Anonymous meetings or other recovery groups at our churches.”

Other states have adopted similar laws that threaten the Church’s ministry to undocumented immigrants. In March 2012, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and several other Christian or-

ganizations filed an *amicus* brief with the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Arizona v. United States*. The brief discussed how the Arizona law and many state immigration laws like it threaten the Catholic mission to provide food, shelter, and other care to all. In June 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its decision and found that several of the provisions of the Arizona law were pre-empted by federal immigration law, so these provisions were struck down.

In recent months, the new Administration has sought to restrict refugees—many of whom have suffered severe religious persecution in their home countries—from entering the United States. Fortunately, federal courts have stopped the federal government from enforcing parts of its executive orders restricting refugees because the orders have the effect of discriminating against people of a particular religion, violating the Constitution’s Establishment Clause.

Is our most cherished freedom truly under threat?

Among many current challenges, these federal and state immigration laws and policies affect the religious liberty of the Church, which seeks to provide Christian charity and pastoral care to people of all backgrounds and faiths. **Religious liberty is more than freedom of worship**; it includes our ability to make our contribution to the common good of all Americans without having to compromise our faith. Without religious liberty properly understood, all of us suffer, including those who seek a better life here in the United States.



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