



June 1, 2026

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Vice Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Collins, Vice Chair Murray, Chair Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As Congress undertakes the Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 appropriations process, I write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration to raise several issues for your consideration. We join with other USCCB committees as they express their views on a range of additional priorities, each with their own connections to human life and dignity.

The wellbeing of immigrants, refugees, unaccompanied noncitizen children, victims of trafficking, and other populations, as well as our immigration system in general, is of deep concern to the Catholic Church. Our perspectives on these matters are grounded in scripture and Catholic teaching, including our belief in the inherent and inviolable dignity of every person.

Whatever disagreements may arise on specific policy questions, migration is fundamentally about the movement of human persons, each of whom is created in the image and likeness of God. In the course of contemporary debate, this reality is frequently overlooked or dismissed entirely, paving the way for dehumanizing rhetoric and policy responses that fail to advance the common good.

As you deliberate on FY 2027 appropriations, please consider the following:

**Foreign-Born Religious Workers (DHS)**

Since its creation in 1990, the non-minister special immigrant provision of the Religious Worker Visa Program has been consistently reauthorized by Congress on a bipartisan basis. In recent years, this reauthorization has occurred annually through the appropriations process. This important program allows those who work in a religious vocation or occupation, but who are not considered members of the clergy or ordained persons within their religious tradition, to serve permanently in the United States. This has made it possible for Catholic sisters and brothers to faithfully serve communities across our nation. **Congress should permanently reauthorize the non-minister special immigrant provision to avoid the uncertainty and disruption that its looming**



**expiration regularly creates for religious organizations, their workers, the communities they serve, and the federal agencies administering the program.**

**We also take this opportunity to reiterate the need for Congress to take up and pass the Religious Workforce Protection Act (H.R. 2672/S. 1298).<sup>1</sup>**

### **Integrity of the Immigration System (DHS/NSRP)**

We join with Congress and the Administration in noting the importance of maintaining the integrity of the U.S. immigration system, and we reaffirm the essential role that oversight agencies play in this regard. Through their work, such agencies promote trust, transparency, fairness, and respect for the rights of those who come in contact with our immigration system—all goals that should be embraced on a bipartisan basis. Unfortunately, many of these agencies have been weakened or have ceased operating entirely within the past year due to steps taken by the Administration. **We strongly encourage Congress to provide robust support for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Office of Inspector General, Office of Immigration Detention Ombudsman, Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, and Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman.**

“We recognize that nations have a responsibility to regulate their borders and establish a just and orderly immigration system for the sake of the common good. Without such processes, immigrants face the risk of trafficking and other forms of exploitation. Safe and legal pathways serve as an antidote to such risks.”<sup>2</sup> In light of this, we are also concerned about the adverse impacts of broad, nationality-based restrictions on legal immigration pathways, whether put in place by the President, the U.S. Department of State, or U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). One prominent example of this has been USCIS’ refusal to adjudicate most benefit requests submitted by nationals of 39 countries, including those already in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Such an approach unjustly keeps family members separated and puts individuals in jeopardy of losing their legal status, regardless of their good-faith efforts to comply with the law. Catholic dioceses have experienced firsthand the debilitating impact of these restrictions, which are forcing priests, religious sisters, and others to abandon their ministries in spite of having a valid legal basis to remain. **We urge Congress to require detailed reporting on the status of all nationality-based restrictions across the State Department and DHS, including what efforts are being undertaken by the Administration to ensure compliance with the First Amendment and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in relation to these restrictions.**

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<sup>1</sup> USCCB Letter to Congress on the RWPA (April 10, 2025), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/USCCB%20Letter%20on%20RWPA.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> USCCB, Press Release, U.S. Bishops Issue a “Special Message” on Immigration from Plenary Assembly in Baltimore (Nov. 12, 2025), <https://www.usccb.org/news/2025/us-bishops-issue-special-message-immigration-plenary-assembly-baltimore> [hereinafter Special Message].

<sup>3</sup> USCIS, Policy Memorandum 602-0194, Hold and Review of USCIS Benefit Applications Filed by Aliens from Additional High-Risk Countries (Jan. 1, 2026) <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/policy-alerts/PM-602-0194-PendingApplicationsAdditionalHighRiskCountries-20260101.pdf>.



Finally, we are alarmed by the wait times faced by many in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program while seeking to renew their protection and work authorization. Processing delays are leading a growing number of DACA beneficiaries to accrue unlawful presence and lose their work authorization, even though they initiate the process many months before expiration. President Trump has stated his belief that DACA recipients “should feel safe,”<sup>4</sup> but the present reality is leading many to feel the opposite. **In addition to renewing our call for Congress to provide DACA beneficiaries and other Dreamers with permanent relief, such as through the DREAM Act, we implore Congress to ensure requests submitted by DACA beneficiaries are adjudicated in a timely manner, with USCIS required to account for excessive processing times and report on efforts the agency is taking to alleviate them.**

### **Humanitarian Protections (LHHS/NSRP)**

We are grateful for the Administration’s reversal of its previous proposal to substantially eliminate funding for the Refugee and Entrant Assistance (REA) account.<sup>5</sup> This account promotes the economic self-sufficiency and successful integration of refugees, asylees, victims of trafficking, and other humanitarian populations through programs administered by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in close collaboration with local communities. Florida and Texas remain the largest beneficiaries of this funding.<sup>6</sup> **As a marker of our country’s commitment to protecting human life and freedom, including through refugee resettlement, we ask Congress to continue funding REA at no less than the FY 2026 level.**

The REA account also funds the care of unaccompanied noncitizen children while in government custody and their protection from exploitation once released through community-based services. We welcome the Administration’s explicit acknowledgements that “ORR is not an immigration or law enforcement agency” and that placing children in the least restrictive setting—ideally, with a vetted family member or other sponsor—is consistent with child welfare best practices and ORR’s legal obligations.<sup>7</sup> As part of its efforts to reduce opportunities for these children to be exploited once released from government care, we strongly support ORR’s use of REA funding to continue expanding access to post-release services, including legal services.

Given our country’s proud tradition as a place of refuge for those fleeing persecution, we are deeply troubled by the way current restrictions are preventing the most vulnerable refugees from being resettled in the United States. This includes those fleeing religious persecution, to whom Congress has expressed a particular commitment through the International Religious Freedom Act,<sup>8</sup> among other measures. **Congress should take steps to ensure humanitarian protections, including refugee resettlement, remain available to those fleeing persecution, especially those**

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<sup>4</sup> Zolan Kanno-Youngs, *A ‘Ticklish Subject’: Trump’s Words on Immigration Often Collide and Contradict*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 10, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/10/us/politics/a-ticklish-subject-trumps-words-on-immigration-often-collide-and-contradict.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Administration for Children, Families, and Communities, FY 2027 Budget Justification at 15, <https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/olab/FY-2027-Final-for-Web-4-3-26.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 250–53.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 32.

<sup>8</sup> *See* 22 U.S.C. 6401.



**persecuted on account of their religious beliefs. We also urge Congress to reauthorize the Lautenberg Amendment as an important component of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, which has facilitated the protection and resettlement of persecuted religious minorities, including many Christians, since 1990.**

Recognizing the limits of domestic protections, international humanitarian and development assistance remain vitally important for addressing forced migration at its source.<sup>9</sup> **Therefore, we encourage Congress to provide a robust allocation for International Humanitarian Assistance and level funding for Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance, which support activities abroad to effectively alleviate the root causes of forced migration and facilitate the safe return of those who have been displaced once conditions have sufficiently improved. To the extent funding is being used to respond to forced displacement and migration generally, we call on Congress to ensure it is consistently obligated in a manner that upholds the principle of non-refoulement.**

### **Enforcement and Detention (DHS)**

Last November, the U.S. bishops stated with a unified voice: “We oppose the indiscriminate mass deportation of people.”<sup>10</sup> Since that time, the Administration has only reaffirmed its commitment to mass deportation.<sup>11</sup> This, and the tactics used to effectuate it,<sup>12</sup> have deepened our concerns about access to due process, threats to family unity, and discriminatory practices. **Given these dynamics and the unprecedented funding for immigration enforcement and detention provided by last year’s reconciliation bill (H.R. 1), we once again ask Congress to limit any further funding increases for these purposes. We also oppose the resurgence of family detention in place of more humane, community-based alternatives and urge Congress to prioritize stringent oversight of all family detention centers.**

Consistent with our previous communications,<sup>13</sup> the USCCB continues to call on Congress to (1) ensure respect for houses of worship and other sensitive locations in the course of immigration enforcement and (2) mandate consistent access to religious and pastoral services for those in immigration detention, regardless of a facility’s operator. **We renew our request for Congress**

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<sup>9</sup> See USCCB and CRS Letter to Congress on International Humanitarian and Development Assistance Funding for FY 2027 (April 23, 2026), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/USCCB-CRS%20Letter%20to%20Congress%20on%20International%20Assistance%20Funding%20for%20Fiscal%20Year%202027.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Special Message, *supra* note 2.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Myah Ward, Eric Bazail-Eimil, & Mgan Messerly, *Trump Administration Tries to Shore Up Its Footing with Immigration Hardliners*, POLITICO (May 8, 2026), <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/05/08/trump-immigration-mass-deportations-criticism-00910678>.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., USCCB, Press Release, “The Thought of Holding Thousands of Families in Massive Warehouses Should Challenge the Conscience of Every American,” Says Bishop Cahill (Feb. 20, 2026), <https://www.usccb.org/news/2026/thought-holding-thousands-families-massive-warehouses-should-challenge-conscience-every>.

<sup>13</sup> See USCCB Letter on Immigration Enforcement and Religious Liberty (Feb. 24, 2026), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/USCCB%20Letter%20on%20Immigration%20Enforcement%20and%20Religious%20Liberty.pdf>; USCCB Letter on FY 2026 Reconciliation Bill (May 15, 2026), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/Letter%20to%20Congress%20on%20FY%202026%20Reconciliation%20Bill.pdf>.



**to condition the use of funding for immigration enforcement and detention on these important aims.**

### **Fairness in Immigration Proceedings (CJS)**

While much is at stake for those navigating our complex immigration system, including in some cases the potential risk of being returned to life-threatening circumstances in one's country of origin, most noncitizens face their proceedings without the assistance of counsel or a basic understanding of our immigration laws. Through the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), Congress has sought to mitigate this disparity—and, at the same time, increase efficiency within proceedings—via programs that increase access to legal information and counseling. These have included the Legal Orientation Program and the Immigration Court Helpdesk. While we are grateful to Congress for consistently funding these efforts for more than two decades, including in FY 2026, the Administration has nevertheless terminated this programming over the past year. **We urge Congress to continue supporting efforts to promote fairness in immigration proceedings through expanded access to information and representation, including legal orientations for those in detention.**

The termination of legal access programming has recently been followed by abrupt staffing changes within EOIR's Recognition and Accreditation (R&A) Program. The R&A Program dates back to 1958, since which point it has effectively expanded access to competent immigration legal representation through a network of recognized organizations and accredited representatives. Besides making quality legal advice more widely available for those in need, the program has also helped to protect communities from *notario* fraud, the unauthorized practice of law, and immigration service fraud. Importantly, these benefits come at no cost to the taxpayer, beyond the limited expense for the R&A Program's administration. Unfortunately, the Administration's recent changes have left R&A adjudications severely understaffed, effectively crippling the program. **We therefore ask Congress to allocate dedicated funding from EOIR's appropriation for the R&A Program in FY 2027, mandating a minimal staffing level that ensures the adjudication of all applications for the program within a period of 90 days.**

### **Anti-Trafficking (LHHS/CJS)**

The U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division (WHD) works domestically to address child labor exploitation and enforce the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, among other important functions. While the Administration proposes reducing the agency's funding, this would in fact undermine its stated goals regarding human trafficking. **In addition to encouraging a robust appropriation for REA and the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs to support victims of trafficking, we implore Congress to increase funding for the WHD in FY 2027.**

We are likewise concerned about continued efforts by the Administration to minimize the Labor Department's International Labor Affairs Bureau (ILAB), which works with foreign governments, the private sector, and civil society organizations around the world to advance our shared goal of



ending child labor and forced labor generally. **We urge Congress to appropriate at least level funding to sustain the important work of ILAB.**

Thank you for taking our views on these important matters into consideration. We remain committed to working with you in pursuit of the common good.

Respectfully,

Most Reverend Brendan J. Cahill  
Bishop of Victoria  
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration