

DATE: June 10, 2013
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**SENATE URGED TO IMPROVE AND APPROVE IMMIGRATION REFORM
LEGISLATION**

*Need a clear, accessible path to citizenship; improved family reunification
Border enforcement should not be prerequisite for legalization
Amendments that impose further restrictions endanger passage*

WASHINGTON— As the U.S. Senate begins debate on immigration reform legislation this week, Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration, urged Congress to approve S. 744, the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act, which would reform the nation's immigration system.

Archbishop Gomez made his statement at a press conference June 10, in San Diego. He was joined by Bishop Jaime Soto of Sacramento, California, board member of Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC); and Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City, chair of the USCCB Communications Committee.

“The outcome of this debate—and of the one to follow in the House of Representatives—will impact the future of our nation in the twenty-first century and beyond,” Archbishop Gomez said. “Each day in our parishes, social service programs, hospitals, and schools we witness the human consequences of a broken immigration system. Families are separated, migrant workers are exploited, and our fellow human beings die in the desert. Without positive change to our immigration laws, we cannot help our brothers and sisters.”

Bishop Soto highlighted the need for comprehensive immigration reform that provides an achievable and accessible path to citizenship that includes the maximum number of people and improves family reunification. “If the goal of immigration reform is to address the issue of irregular immigration for good in a humane manner, then all undocumented persons should be brought out of the shadows and placed into the new system,” Bishop Soto said. “Leaving a large group behind does not solve the problem and, in the future, could create new ones.”

In his statement, Bishop Wester opposed proposed floor amendments that would mandate additional border enforcement as a prerequisite to legalization and citizenship.

“Making the legalization program contingent upon border metrics that are practically impossible to achieve would effectively prevent the undocumented from ever becoming citizens, or even legal residents,” Bishop Wester said. “Such a step would render the immigration reform program useless and the bill not worth supporting.”

He also warned against accepting amendments that would reduce the number of persons eligible for citizenship. Among them would be making the path to citizenship more difficult by increasing the amount of fines or imposing difficult income requirements including the payment of back taxes.

Archbishop Gomez also stated that the Senate should not adopt amendments relating to the redefinition of marriage, which would be unacceptable and would jeopardize passage of the bill.

“I encourage our elected officials to move forward and debate immigration reform in a civil and respectful way. The U.S. Catholic bishops are committed to working with them to enact humane immigration reform legislation as soon as possible,” Archbishop Gomez said. “In the end, the outcome of this debate will not only affect our nation’s future—it will impact our soul.”

More information and full text of speeches can be found at www.usccb.org/about/migration-and-refugee-services/index.cfm#immigration

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Keywords: migrants, immigrants, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB, Committee on Migration, Congress, U.S. Senate, Archbishop José Gomez, Bishop Jaime Soto, Bishop John C. Wester, immigration reform, border enforcement, citizenship, Catholic Legal Immigration Network, CLINIC, S.744, Border Security Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act

13-108

Sec,DD,DioNewspapers,CNS,RNS,Crux, Congressional Reporters, San Diego Press

*Spanish version follows.