



## United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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December 15, 2023

Dear Senator/Representative:

Peace to you during the Season of Advent.

As the year comes to a close and you continue to consider critical funding measures, we urge you to seek just legislation that advances the common good and upholds the God-given dignity of each person. This has been the consistent call of the Church, which seeks protection and compassion for all, from the pre-born child, to the suffering in our own country and abroad, to the family fleeing persecution.

As you know, the Senate amendment to H.R. 815, the “National Security and Border Act, 2024”, which seeks to act on President Biden’s national security supplemental appropriations requests, is currently before the U.S. Senate. We have [expressed](#) support for several provisions in the Administration’s supplemental requests, some of which are embodied in the bill before the Senate, such as [funding for humanitarian relief efforts](#), refugee resettlement, the Shelter and Services Program, the [Nonprofit Security Grant Program](#), and related efforts to address root causes of conflict and migration. We are encouraged by robust support for these and other priorities. We are deeply concerned, however, about several migration-related proposals that are reportedly being discussed in the context of H.R. 815, and we urge you to carefully consider the real-life impact such proposals will likely have on vulnerable people.

To be clear, Catholic social teaching recognizes a country’s right and responsibility to manage its borders in accordance with the common good.<sup>1</sup> This need not and should not occur at the expense of our nation’s fundamental commitment to humanitarian protection. We fear, however, that migration-related proposals reportedly under discussion in connection with the “National Security and Border Act” would do just that. As [stated](#) earlier this week, “we affirm and defend an unconditional respect for human life and dignity, no matter the circumstance. Recent policy proposals that would undermine respect for the sanctity of human life, including that of the humble migrant seeking asylum at our border, remind us of the perils of our own culture, in which hope and unity collide with an abundance of fear and division, often yielding indifference to our shared humanity.”

Our immigration system is broken, as underscored by the current humanitarian situation at the U.S.-Mexico border and ongoing challenges faced by interior communities. Legislative solutions have been proposed, but achieving a comprehensive solution has repeatedly eluded Congress. However, as the last several decades have demonstrated, it is both ineffective and unjust to pursue an enforcement-only approach to immigration, while not addressing the inadequacies of our legal immigration system and the root causes that compel people to migrate. Further, attempting to resolve complex migration-related challenges that have festered for decades in the time-sensitive context of emergency funding is not conducive to prudent policymaking.

Simply doubling down on enforcement and restrictive measures alone in the way recent proposals would do will not reduce irregular migration, especially when it is the result of desperation. Rather, such efforts will have the unintended consequence of further empowering smugglers, traffickers, gangs, and other bad actors who seek to exploit vulnerable persons, most often women and children. This is why we have long called for targeted enforcement measures, combined with actions to modernize and increase capacity at ports of entry, as well as increasing the number of, and access to, lawful immigration pathways. Unfortunately, today, asylum and temporary protections are seen by some as the only realistic opportunities for family- and employment-based

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<sup>1</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “Political authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions, especially with regard to the immigrants’ duties toward their country of adoption. Immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens” (no. 2241).

immigration—not because they are easy to attain but because the intended pathways are simply unworkable in far too many cases. It is possible to rectify this without sacrificing life-saving protections. Finally, to reiterate, no sustainable reduction in irregular migration can be achieved without a long-term commitment to addressing its root causes in countries of origin. Much more attention should be given to the myriad causes of increased migration in our world, rather than simply responding to its symptoms.

Whether curtailing due process through rapid expulsions and nationwide expedited removal, mandating harmful and excessive detention, or making it even more difficult to attain humanitarian relief through heightened legal standards, we implore you to reject these counterproductive proposals and instead pursue bold and forward-looking solutions.

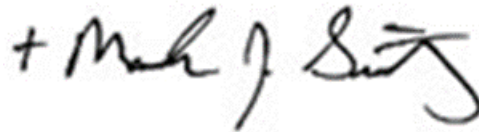
Additionally, we are grateful that the proposals thus far with respect to the Senate amendment to H.R. 815 appear to retain long-standing, bipartisan, and critical protections against taxpayer funding of elective abortion. Nonetheless, on account of the Administration's recently proposed regulations regarding vulnerable unaccompanied minors and its policy of transporting them across state lines specifically for the purpose of facilitating abortions, as well as its unlawful insertion of elective abortion into the veterans health system, we strongly urge Congress to provide additional protection in appropriations legislation. That is important here, as the Senate amendment would provide funding needed to administer medical care to migrants in federal custody and provide health care to certain U.S. veterans abroad who experience very limited access to care otherwise.

There are many weighty issues before you as the year comes to an end. As you seek to address them, we urge you to not see each other as enemies but to work together in a truly bipartisan fashion, exercising your common leadership to meet the important ends described above. We stand ready to assist and continue to hold you and your work in our prayers.

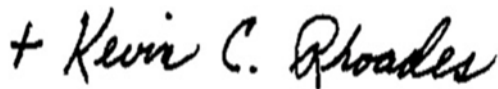
Sincerely,



Most Rev. Michael F. Burbidge  
Bishop of Arlington  
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities



Most Reverend Mark J. Seitz  
Bishop of El Paso  
Chairman, Committee on Migration



Most Rev. Kevin C. Rhoades  
Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend  
Chairman, Committee on Religious Liberty



Most Rev. A. Elias Zaidan  
Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of  
Los Angeles  
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and  
Peace