



Committee on Migration
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February 6, 2024

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader Schumer and Leader McConnell:

While taking no position on the overall measure, I write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration to address some of the proposed migration-related provisions in the Senate's version of the "Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024" (H.R. 815). We welcome and encourage genuine bipartisan cooperation to address the challenges of our time, but we believe this effort to make sweeping changes to immigration law—particularly in the context of this supplemental funding bill—is flawed, both in terms of substance and form. Rather than sustainably reducing migration to the U.S.-Mexico border, consistent with the common good and the good-faith intentions of many lawmakers, several changes proposed in this bill would unjustly undermine due process and pave the way for avoidable and potentially life-threatening harm to be inflicted on vulnerable persons seeking humanitarian protection in the United States. As shepherds committed to defending the sanctity of human life and upholding the God-given dignity of all, we implore you to reject those changes.

Our perspective on these provisions is based on Catholic social teaching, which recognizes a country's right and responsibility to manage its borders in accordance with the common good.¹ However, as we have constantly implored and recently [affirmed](#), this need not and should not occur at the expense of our nation's fundamental commitment to humanitarian protection. There exists a simultaneous moral obligation to respect the life and dignity of each human person, including the "stranger" described in Sacred Scripture,² whom we may call "migrant" or "asylum seeker." These principles are complimentary. The legitimate interests of the state to regulate immigration and safeguard the wellbeing of the existing population should not be carried out in such a way that concern for the human lives of newcomers is set aside and vice versa.

It is for this reason that we raise serious concerns about certain migration-related provisions in Division C of H.R. 815, including: (1) Sections 3141–3144 and 3146, which would effectively mandate rushed proceedings for most people seeking protection, severely limiting due process and access to asylum; (2) Section 3202, which would heighten the credible fear standard, making it

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2241.

² Mt. 25:31–46.

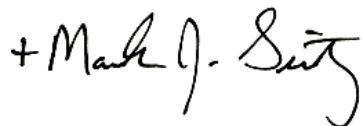
even more difficult than it already is under current law for those with bona fide asylum claims to pursue relief in the United States; and (3) Section 3301, which would establish an expulsion authority akin to what was used under Title 42, inevitably producing the same opportunity for harmful, arbitrary, and counterproductive treatment of vulnerable persons.

In prior communications to you, the USCCB has [expressed](#) support for several aspects of the Administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 supplemental requests, some of which are embodied in the Senate's version of H.R. 815, including [funding for humanitarian relief efforts](#), refugee resettlement, the Shelter and Services Program, the [Nonprofit Security Grant Program](#), and related efforts to address the root causes of conflict and migration. We further maintain our general support for long-term relief for Afghans relocated to the United States and improved access to protection for at-risk Afghans abroad, increased opportunities for family reunification and employment-based immigration, expanded access to work authorization for newcomers, and ensuring vulnerable children have assistance navigating their immigration proceedings. These are positive provisions, some of which would likely reduce irregular migration, and we are grateful for their inclusion.

Nevertheless, we respectfully urge you to reject provisions in the Senate's version of H.R. 815 that further restrict access to asylum, curtail due process for noncitizens, and create authorities inconsistent with the United States' obligations under international law. Such measures target the symptoms of underlying challenges through an ineffective deterrence-centered approach instead of addressing the challenges themselves. We reiterate that attempting to resolve complex migration-related challenges that have festered for decades in the time-sensitive context of an emergency funding bill is not conducive to prudent policymaking. Moreover, the provisions prompting our concern would not reduce irregular migration, especially when it is the result of desperation. Rather, they would 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.

We will always commend good-faith bipartisan cooperation to address the challenges confronting our nation, and we cannot achieve the necessary reform of our immigration system without authentic bipartisanship. A transparent, well-informed, bicameral, and truly bipartisan approach is urgently needed, and my brother bishops and I remain committed to helping you to achieve it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark J. Seitz". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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

CC: The Honorable Mike Johnson
The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
All U.S. Senators