



August 28, 2025

Dear Senator/Representative:

As Congress works to finalize appropriations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026, I write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration to address several issues. We join with other USCCB committees that have expressed 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 great concern to the Catholic Church. In the face of deep political divisions and policy disagreements, it is important to recognize that immigration is first and foremost about the movement of human persons, each of whom is created in the image and likeness of God. As you deliberate on FY 2026 appropriations, we urge you to keep this fundamental truth in mind, as well as the following requests:

### **Religious Workers**

Since its creation in 1990, the non-minister special immigrant provision of the Religious Worker Visa Program has been consistently reauthorized by Congress. In recent years, this reauthorization has occurred on an annual basis 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 this program to avoid the uncertainty and disruption that its looming expiration unnecessarily 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 pressing need for Congress to take up and pass the Religious Workforce Protection Act (H.R. 2672/S. 1298).<sup>1</sup> Communities of faith in all fifty states are depending on this targeted, bipartisan source of relief that only Congress can provide.

### **Humanitarian Protections**

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Pope Pius XII boldly proclaimed: "The family of Nazareth in exile, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, emigrants in Egypt and refugees there to escape the wrath of an ungodly king, are the model, the example and the consolation of emigrants and pilgrims of every age and country, of all refugees of every condition who, beset by persecution or necessity, are forced to leave their homeland, beloved family and dear friends for foreign lands."<sup>2</sup> Today, millions of families find themselves in situations not unlike that experienced by the Holy Family.

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

<sup>2</sup> Pope Pius XII, *Exsul Familia* (Aug. 1, 1952), [https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/la/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_apc\\_19520801\\_exsul-familia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/la/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19520801_exsul-familia.html) (translated from Latin).



This land has long stood as a beacon of hope for many such families, and it has also been enriched greatly by their contributions.<sup>3</sup> Beyond the reciprocal benefits of humanitarian protections, however, our values and moral credibility as a nation are at stake today. In the Refugee Act of 1980, Congress formally declared “it is the policy of the United States to encourage all nations to provide assistance and resettlement opportunities to refugees to the fullest extent possible.”<sup>4</sup> The near-total suspension of refugee admissions and the significant restrictions on asylum access we now see in place contradict that bipartisan commitment and undermine our country’s ability to lead by example. Congress has both the power and responsibility to reaffirm this commitment to humanitarian protections, furthering the national interest and protecting human life in the process.

We strongly encourage Congress to preserve funding for life-saving humanitarian protections, including refugee resettlement. We applaud the funding in the Senate Appropriations Committee’s Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies proposal for the Refugee and Entrant Assistance (REA) account, as well as the accompanying report language. This account promotes the economic self-sufficiency and successful integration of refugees, asylees, victims of trafficking, and other vulnerable populations through programs administered by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in close collaboration with local communities. In FY 2024, the states that benefitted most from ORR funding were Florida, Texas, Virginia, California, and Kentucky.<sup>5</sup>

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 humanitarian protections, international assistance remains vitally important for addressing forced migration at its source.<sup>6</sup> Pope Leo XIV has warned against an isolationist mindset because it “poses a serious threat to the sharing of responsibility, multilateral cooperation, the pursuit of the common good and global solidarity for the benefit of our entire human family.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, we encourage Congress to continue funding accounts such as International Disaster Assistance and Migration and Refugee 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.

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<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., ROBIN GHERTNER, SUZANNE MACARTNEY, & MEREDITH DOST, U.S. DEP’T OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVS., THE FISCAL IMPACT OF REFUGEES AND ASYLEES AT THE FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL LEVELS FROM 2005-2019 (Feb. 2024), <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/e2ab46e2d0248f36c6d03ea63c089a54/aspe-report-refugee-fiscal-impact.pdf> (finding refugees contributed over \$120 billion more than they cost in government expenditures over the reviewed fifteen-year period).

<sup>4</sup> Refugee Act of 1980, S. 643, 96th Cong. § 101(a) (1980).

<sup>5</sup> DEP’T OF HEALTH AND HUM. SERVS., ADMIN. FOR CHILD. AND FAMS., CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET JUSTIFICATION: FISCAL YEAR 2025, at 55–56, 62–63 <https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/olab/fy-2025-congressional-justification.pdf> (based on the sums received by each state for Transitional and Medical Services and Refugee Support Services combined).

<sup>6</sup> See USCCB Letter to Congress on International Assistance Funding for FY 2026 (June 9, 2025), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/USCCB-CRS%20Letter%20on%20Foreign%20Assistance%20Sent%20to%20House%20of%20Representatives,%20June%209,%202025.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Message of Pope Leo XIV for the 111th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (July 25, 2025), <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/migration/documents/20250725-world-migrants-day-2025.html>.



## **Unaccompanied Children**

Unaccompanied noncitizen children continue to be a population of special concern for the Church. During his pontificate, Pope Francis spoke clearly about the need to protect young migrants, observing how “unrestrained competition for quick and easy profit brings with it the cultivation of perverse scourges such as child trafficking, the exploitation and abuse of minors and, generally, the depriving of rights intrinsic to childhood.”<sup>8</sup> As we have previously expressed,<sup>9</sup> exploitation of this highly vulnerable population is most likely to occur when these children lack access to support and become isolated from their communities. Therefore, we also affirm the Senate’s proposal for funding in the REA account to support this population, including the continued availability of contingency funding for sudden increases in the number of unaccompanied children requiring care.

We strongly affirm the Senate’s report language related to expanding mental health services, ensuring independent oversight of the UC Program through the Office of the Ombudsperson, prioritizing small-scale, community- and family-based placements, and expanding post-release services to every child, including access to legal services. In addition to the adequate screening of potential sponsors, including through home studies, post-release services play an essential role in preventing and detecting exploitation. We urge Congress to continue prioritizing family reunification and the best interests of each child as guiding principles of the UC Program.

## **Enforcement and Detention**

Given the unprecedented funding already provided for immigration enforcement and detention through H.R. 1, we ask Congress to limit any further funding increases for these purposes in FY 2026 appropriations. Catholic teaching clearly recognizes a country’s right to regulate immigration and promote public safety, consistent with the common good. At the same time, the U.S. bishops have consistently opposed a disproportionate emphasis on enforcement, and we are deeply concerned that the current approach is undermining the already limited due process provided to noncitizens, threatening family unity, and fomenting discrimination. Unfortunately, the Administration’s rhetoric regarding an enforcement focused on those who have committed crimes is contradicted by recent data, which reveals nearly four times as many people without criminal histories being arrested as those with criminal histories.<sup>10</sup>

As Pope Francis reminded us in his final days, “an authentic rule of law is verified precisely in the dignified treatment that all people deserve, especially the poorest and most marginalized.”<sup>11</sup> By comparison, an approach primarily based on the goal of “mass deportations” is certain to result in the arbitrary administration of our laws to the detriment of families and entire communities.

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<sup>8</sup> Message of Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (Jan. 15, 2017), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160908\\_world-migrants-day-2017.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20160908_world-migrants-day-2017.html).

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Congress with Recommendations to Enhance Protections for Unaccompanied Children (Nov. 9, 2023), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/USCCB%20Letter%20with%20UC%20Recommendations.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> David J. Bier, *ICE Is Arresting 1,100 Percent More Noncriminals on the Streets Than in 2017*, CATO (June 24, 2025), <https://www.cato.org/blog/ice-arresting-1100-percent-more-noncriminals-streets-2017>.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Pope Francis to the Bishops of the United States of America (Feb. 10, 2025), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2025/documents/20250210-lettera-vescovi-usa.html>.



The recent influx in funding provided by H.R. 1 also makes robust oversight of enforcement efforts more critical than ever. Recent efforts by the Administration to diminish the capacity of agencies specifically charged by Congress with oversight of immigration enforcement and promoting transparency—the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman, the Immigration Detention Ombudsman, and the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties—should be firmly rejected.

We implore Congress to condition the use of detention funding on providing access to pastoral and religious services for all detainees, consistent with the U.S. Constitution and other sources of law. We appreciate the House Appropriations Committee’s bipartisan adoption of report language encouraging U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to evaluate sensitive locations when conducting immigration enforcement operations, and we urge this language to be codified as part of the final bill. In addition to ensuring access to hospitals, schools, and other essential services,<sup>12</sup> due regard should be shown for the fundamental freedom to worship because all people “should be unified in the conviction that people must be free to fulfill their duties to God without fear.”<sup>13</sup>

We reaffirm the need for Congress to fund more humane, cost-effective, and community-based alternatives to detention, especially for families. The resumption and planned expansion of family detention inflicts a moral wound on our society, and we are particularly concerned about the risks posed to pregnant and postpartum mothers and their young children in detention.<sup>14</sup> We oppose any further funding to expand family detention.

### **Legal Orientation Program**

Upholding the integrity of our legal immigration system is a goal that transcends party lines. While much is at stake for those navigating our complex system, many noncitizens face their proceedings without the assistance of counsel or a basic understanding of our immigration laws, resulting in unjust outcomes and inefficiencies. Therefore, we appreciate and affirm the funding included for the Legal Orientation Program in the Senate Appropriations Committee’s Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies proposal, as well as the accompanying report language. Moreover, we are grateful for the Committee’s encouragement of efforts to specifically improve the fairness and efficiency of immigration adjudications involving children.

### **Citizenship and Assimilation Grant Program**

We have long encouraged programs that promote full participation in the civic life of our nation, inclusive of all the rights and responsibilities that accompany citizenship. One such initiative is the Citizenship and Assimilation (formerly Integration) Grant Program. With modest funding, this program helps to provide patriotic men and women with the knowledge and skills necessary to

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<sup>12</sup> Press Release, USCCB, “Human Dignity is Not Dependent on a Person’s Citizenship or Immigration Status” (Jan. 23, 2025), <https://www.usccb.org/news/2025/human-dignity-not-dependent-persons-citizenship-or-immigration-status>.

<sup>13</sup> Bishop Kevin C. Rhodes, *Bishop Rhodes: Freedom to Worship for Migrants*, OSV NEWS (Jan. 31, 2025), <https://www.osvnews.com/bishop-rhodes-freedom-of-worship-for-migrants/>.

<sup>14</sup> See Press Release, USCCB, Protecting Pregnant Mothers and their Children Can Never be Considered “Obsolete” (May 19, 2025), <https://www.usccb.org/news/2025/protecting-pregnant-mothers-and-their-children-can-never-be-considered-obsolete>.



become outstanding Americans. Because this comports with the Administration's stated goals, we were surprised and disappointed to see the sudden termination of grants for this program earlier in the year. We ask Congress to reaffirm its commitment to this small but important program to ensure qualified immigrants can continue to become devoted citizens of our nation.

### **Anti-Trafficking**

"Human trafficking is not only a serious crime—it is a rejection of the God-given dignity of every human being."<sup>15</sup> In addition to encouraging a robust appropriation for REA and the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs to support victims of trafficking, we once again renew our appeal for Congress to increase funding for the Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division (WHD). WHD works domestically to address child labor exploitation and enforce the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, among other important functions. The Administration's proposed cuts to the agency would further reduce its capacity at a time when staffing is already at a fifty-year low; meanwhile, U.S.-citizen and foreign-born children alike are vulnerable to the sin of trafficking, often going undetected.<sup>16</sup>

We are likewise concerned about efforts to dissolve the Labor Department's International Labor Affairs Bureau, which works with 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 preserve this important agency, which dates back to the Truman Administration.

Finally, I wish to reaffirm our support for the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2025, which would bolster our nation's efforts to eradicate human trafficking and assist human trafficking survivors.<sup>17</sup>

Thank you for taking our views on these important matters into consideration.

Respectfully,

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

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<sup>15</sup> Press Release, USCCB, Human Trafficking is a Rejection of the God-given Dignity of Every Human Being (Feb. 6, 2025), <https://www.usccb.org/news/2025/human-trafficking-rejection-god-given-dignity-every-human-being>.

<sup>16</sup> JAKE BARNES, ET AL., TO HELP U.S. WORKERS, WE NEED LABOR STANDARDS ENFORCEMENT, NOT MASS DEPORTATIONS, WORKPLACE JUST. LAB (May 2025), [https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/WJL/WJL\\_immigration\\_databrief\\_May2025.pdf](https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/WJL/WJL_immigration_databrief_May2025.pdf); Press Release, N.Y.U., Child Labor Trafficking Is Ensnaring Both US- and Foreign-Born, Study Finds (Apr. 18, 2024), <https://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2024/april/child-labor-trafficking-is-ensnaring-both-us--and-foreign-born--0.html>.

<sup>17</sup> The bill was first reintroduced during the 119th Congress in February 2025 (H.R. 1144). See Joint Letter to Congress on H.R. 1144 (April 1, 2025), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/Joint%20Catholic%20Letter%20on%20H.R.%201144.pdf>. A subsequent version was introduced in April (H.R. 2796). The USCCB supports passage of either version.