April 26, 2016

The Honorable Jason Chaffetz
Chairman
Oversight and Government Reform Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Elijah Cummings
Ranking Member
Oversight and Government Reform Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Chaffetz and Ranking Member Cummings:

In advance of the full Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearings on *Criminal Aliens Released by the Department of Homeland Security* on Thursday, we write to provide the views of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and ask that this statement be included as part of the official hearings record.

Over the past year, anti-immigrant – and by extension anti-Latino and anti-Muslim – rhetoric has reached a fever pitch. Immigrants have been smeared as "killers" and "rapists." They have been accused of bringing drugs, crime and terrorism. There have been calls to seal the borders to Muslim immigrants, to build a wall between the United States and Mexico, and many threats have been made against Muslims. A radio talk show host in Iowa called for enslavement of undocumented immigrants if they do not leave within 60 days. There have been calls to repeal the 14th Amendment's guarantee of citizenship to people born in the United States, with allegations that many people come here to have so-called "anchor babies." And the terms "illegal aliens" and "illegals" – which many mainstream news sources wisely rejected years ago because they dehumanize and stigmatize people – have resurfaced.

We strongly believe that placing blame on all immigrants for crime and violence is unconstructive and misguided. The climate of bias and hostility against immigrants that pervades the immigration debate demonizes communities and hurts our country by obstructing the reform Americans desperately need to fix the broken immigration system.

The Anti-Defamation League
As a civil rights and human relations organization founded in 1913 with a mission statement "to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment for all," the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has always promoted fair and humane immigration policies. Through legislative advocacy, litigation, and public awareness campaigns, ADL has helped expose anti-immigrant rhetoric and called for a responsible public debate that will honor America's history as a nation of immigrants. Mindful of the role that xenophobia has played in hindering progress toward sound policy solutions, ADL works to support fair and equal treatment of all and exposes the dangers of stereotyping.

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Anti-Defamation League, 605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158-3560 T 212.885.7700 F 212.867.0779 www.adl.org

ADL today is the foremost non-governmental authority on domestic terrorism, extremism, organized hate groups, and hate crimes in the United States. The League monitors, analyzes, and exposes the full range of domestic extremist groups and international terrorist organizations, and maintains comprehensive, frequently-updated informational resources for law enforcement personnel engaged in combating extremism and criminal activity.

With this expertise, ADL has taken a lead role in exposing the virulent anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric being promoted by anti-immigrant groups and extremists. In particular, ADL has exposed the crossover that exists between mainstream and extremist groups that are behind much of the harsh anti-immigrant rhetoric and activity that has surged in various locales around the country in recent months. ADL also analyzes information and trends regarding anti-immigrant activity and bias on a national and local level, informing the public, policymakers, and the media about its research through blog posts, reports, and articles.

The Dangers of the Anti-Immigrant Movement

Unfortunately, prejudice and violence directed against immigrants is not new; they have been a frequent target of hate throughout our history.   This is ironic given that the United States is a Nation of Immigrants – and the ancestors of most Americans faced similar prejudice when they came to the United States. In the 1800's, the targets of hate were largely Irish, German, and Jewish immigrants. Next was a wave of anti-Chinese sentiment culminating with the discriminatory Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Then came bigotry against Japanese immigrants, which led to the shameful internment of more than 110,000 individuals of Japanese descent – including many citizens – during World War II. Today, anti-immigrant bigotry largely focuses on Latinos and Muslims.

Two bloggers, Carol Brown and Paul Sperry, offer good examples of the current hostile anti-Muslim immigrant climate. Brown, who maintains an anti-Muslim blog and writes for an online publication, *American Thinker*, published an article in which she insisted that Muslim immigrants are trying to conquer the U.S. and that "Muslim refugees swarm into the United States as part of this conquest." According to her, "we are importing Islamic terror. Not because every Muslim is a terrorist. But because enough of them are. And plenty more who don't commit acts of terror support it – quietly at home or loudly in the street."

Paul Sperry's article in the online publication *Investor's Business Daily*, "Muslim Immigration Poses Serious National Security Threat," conveyed a similar theme. He wrote: "the main homeland threat from groups like IS [Islamic State] comes through our immigration system. If they also use our loose policies as a vehicle for jihad and Islamization, we will face the same crisis as Eurabia [a derogatory term meant to describe Muslim immigration to Europe.]" He has also asserted, as have other anti-Muslim bloggers, that Muslims in cities like Alexandria, Virginia, Dearborn, Michigan or Minneapolis refuse to assimilate, and that "heavily Muslim immigrant enclaves" are "breeding grounds for terrorism."

These modern day manifestations of the anti-immigrant movement have also been characterized by allegations of criminal activity by undocumented immigrants in the United States. Recently, even some mainstream figures have begun echoing extremist claims that immigrants are "killers" and "rapists" bringing crime to our shores. Sadly, while the targets may have changed over time, the messages of hate against immigrants in this country have had an ugly and enduring theme. It is long past time for that to end.

It is important to emphasize what research shows – that immigrants, regardless of where they are from, what immigration status they hold, and how much education they have completed – are *less likely* than native-born citizens to commit crimes or become incarcerated. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, while the overall percentage of immigrants and the number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. both increased sharply between 1990 and 2010, the violent crime rate in the U.S. during that time plummeted 45 percent and the property crime rate dropped by 42 percent. Studies have consistently found that immigrants are *less likely* to be incarcerated than native-born Americans, and that there is no correlation between crime rates and levels of immigration. Other studies have found that crime rates are lowest in states with the highest immigration growth rates. To address common myths about immigrants, the League prepared a well-sourced Myths and Facts About Immigrants and Immigration.

The tragic murder of Kathryn Steinle in San Francisco, allegedly by an undocumented immigrant who had reportedly been deported a number of times, is a tragedy and a failure of the system – but it is also an anomaly. Unfortunately, anti-immigrant activists have seized upon this murder to promote fear about all undocumented immigrants. Groups and figures in the movement are using this killing to rail against immigration reform and sanctuary cities more broadly, to announce a proposed boycott of San Francisco, and to justify their support for discriminating against immigrants and those perceived to be immigrants.

This is wrong. In fact, sanctuary cities can help ensure that undocumented immigrants can report crimes, access hospital and other social services, and generally interact with law enforcement and public officials without fear of deportation. Scapegoating immigrants by labeling them criminals, however, threatens to create an underclass of people who do not have open access to police protection if they become victims of crimes or hate crimes. If immigrants do not feel they can trust the police, they become uniquely vulnerable to further attacks because they have little legal recourse.

Demonizing all undocumented immigrants for the criminal acts of a few is not only misguided, but also dangerous. When laws and policies weaken law enforcement officers' relationship with immigrant communities, it puts everyone, not just minority communities, at risk. Demonizing immigrants and driving a wedge between them and law enforcement deters undocumented immigrants and United States citizens who have family members who are undocumented not only from calling the police when they become the victim of a crime, but also from coming forward as witnesses to crimes committed against others. When immigrant communities start to fear local law enforcement, rather than to trust them, society in general becomes less safe.

The dangers of demonizing immigrants are not just theoretical. This past year, ADL condemned an apparent hate crime against a homeless Latino man outside a Dorchester, Massachusetts MBTA stop. The victim was apparently sleeping outside the subway station when the perpetrators attacked. Two brothers from South Boston were arrested for the attack, which left the man with a broken nose, battered arms and chest, and face soaked in urine. One of the brothers reportedly told police when questioned about the assault, "Donald Trump was right – all these illegals need to be deported." Shortly thereafter, a taxi driver in Pittsburgh, a Moroccan immigrant, was shot by a passenger who had earlier said, "You seem to be like a Pakistani guy. Are you from Pakistan?" and accused the driver of supporting ISIS.

Reasonable people can differ about how we should fix our broken immigration system, but stereotypes, slurs, smears and insults should have no place in the debate. The words that people use on the campaign trail, in Committee rooms and on the floor of Congress, on the nightly news, and in their living rooms, all have consequences. They impact our ability to sustain a society that strives to ensure dignity and equality for all. The climate of bias and hostility against immigrants that has emerged is unproductive for the immigration debate and can pave the way for people to act on bigotry and prejudice.

The task of fixing America's broken immigration system is urgent and serious – and demonizing immigrants does nothing to advance constructive solutions. ADL supports a comprehensive approach to reform that includes (1) a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, (2) fair treatment and equal access to human services for immigrants, and (3) a sound border security strategy. As the largest nongovernmental trainer of law enforcement on hate crimes and extremism in the United States, ADL has been a leading advocate for policies that keep responsibility for immigration enforcement at the federal level, allowing local law enforcement to establish and foster trust with the communities they have sworn to serve and protect.

Instead of stereotyping and fear mongering, we must have a respectful policy conversation that upholds America's best ideals of ensuring dignity for all and that honors America's heritage as a nation of immigrants.

Sincerely,

Jonathan A. Greenblatt
CEO

Marvin D. Nathan
National Chair