



April 25, 2016

Dear Members of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform,

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Institute Justice Team urges you to show compassion for the most vulnerable people in our world today including immigrants, refugees, and people of the Muslim faith. The Sisters of Mercy is an international community of Roman Catholic women who dedicate their lives to God through vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and service. They sponsor and serve in more than 200 organizations – such as schools and hospitals – that address those needs.

We urge committee members to renounce any policies that would hinder refugee resettlement in the United States. Since 1843 we have ministered to the needs of immigrant persons in response to the Gospel's call to welcome the stranger and to live in communion with others. Through our ministries, our sisters and associates have borne witness to the extreme hardships faced by refugees. We strongly oppose H.R. 4731, "Refugee Program Integrity Restoration Act of 2016," which would severely reduce refugee admissions and effectively prevent Muslim refugees from seeking safe haven in the United States. The United States has a history of providing safety for refugees and we ask you to uphold this longstanding policy.

We urge committee members to publicly support deferred action for families while working to enact comprehensive immigration reform. These desperately needed reforms would stay the deportations of many immigrants with close family ties and relationships in the U.S. Above all, it would protect and keep families together. On World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2015, Pope Francis stated, "The Church without frontiers, Mother to all, spreads throughout the world a culture of acceptance and solidarity, in which no one is seen as useless, out of place, or disposable." We reverence the dignity of each person and work to end policies that tear families apart and treat people as disposable.

We urge committee members to end the raids on Central American children and families and provide adequate legal representation to this vulnerable population. These children and adults are at risk of extreme violence and even death if they are forced to return. Worse, the majority of these families have been stripped of their right to a fair hearing on their asylum-related claims. Raids are the wrong response to the humanitarian crisis in Central America. These families warrant our protection, not persecution. And many of these families are eligible for asylum under U.S. law. As such, this vulnerable group should be given adequate legal counsel and a genuine opportunity to seek humanitarian relief before a judge. We therefore strongly support The Fair Day in Court for Kids Act, introduced as S. 2540 by Senator Reid (D-NV) and H.R. 4646 by Representative Lofgren (CA-19), which would ensure access to counsel, legal orientation programs, and post-release services for children and other vulnerable individuals while they are in immigration court proceedings.

We urge committee members to dismantle the harmful family detention system. The government's aggressive stance on undocumented immigrants has devastated and separated many children from their families. It is our duty to welcome these children, not imprison them. Every man, woman, and child should be treated

with dignity and respect. The Sisters of Mercy joins many other religious organizations calling on you to end family detention immediately.

We urge committee members to be in solidarity with Muslim Americans. Hateful rhetoric against Muslim Americans has saturated our culture, media, even our elections. This hate breeds mistrust, fear and hurt that contribute to violence throughout our society. Practicing nonviolence calls us to infuse our own communities with peace and justice both in words and action. Please be a voice against hate and welcome everyone as a brother and sister, not degrade people based on their race, religion or country of origin. The vile rhetoric is not only damaging to the people it is aimed at but to our children and society as a whole. We ask you to disavow crimes against Muslim Americans and reject the false stereotype of Muslims as terrorists.

We call on you to recognize the human dignity of each person and to work with us for a future when our country will again welcome those who are different from ourselves and those seeking refuge and a better life for themselves and their families.

Sincerely,

The Institute Justice Team
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

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