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Border Policy: Addressing the Root Causes of Hunger and Immigration

Bread for the World recognizes immigration to be a hunger issue on both sides of the border. We call on Congress to take a comprehensive approach, one that welcomes the migrant and addresses the underlying causes of undocumented immigration. Not only would this be the moral thing to do but it also makes fiscal sense.

We will continue to press Congress to work in a bipartisan manner to pass legislation that protects the God-given dignity and rights of every human being.

Background

Even though the United States spends more than \$11 billion on border enforcement annually,¹ thousands of new undocumented immigrants arrive every year.² This level of spending on border enforcement, including personnel, has had minimal impact on curtailing undocumented immigration and has come at a high economic and human cost. Data from the Department of Homeland Security, for instance, shows that known migrant deaths have nearly doubled over a decade.³

In any immigration reform legislation, we urge Congress to:

1. Address the factors that drive people to flee their home country. Immigration is an international hunger and poverty issue. Most undocumented immigrants to the United States come from Central America, through the southern border. Many of them are fleeing hunger, extreme poverty, and violence. Any reform policies should support countries in the Northern Triangle in order to reduce food insecurity, violence, and other factors that push people to migrate.

- Migration should be a choice. Addressing push factors will help people *choose* to either stay in their homes or migrate lawfully.
- Currently, the Central America aid package stands at \$655 million.⁴ Congress should prioritize funding to address push factors in Central America over increased funding for border enforcement.

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Jeffrey Austin

Border patrol funding is nearly 17 times more than aid support for Central America

\$655 million: Aid to Central America

\$11 billion: Border Patrol Funding

2. Support family unity. As Christians, we appreciate and value the importance of the family unit. Immigration raids, detentions, and a broken immigration system separates families. Removing workers from the household depletes needed family and community resources that allow children to survive and thrive.

- Improving access to a pathway to citizenship reduces hunger and poverty for undocumented immigrants and their families.⁵ A pathway to citizenship for Dreamers would benefit the U.S. economy by up to \$7 billion a year.⁶
- Bipartisan immigration reform proposals, such as the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013, keep families together while reducing the budget deficit by up to \$135 billion in the first decade, and \$685 billion in the second decade.⁷
- We support the Dream Act of 2017 and other measures that provide documentation and a reasonable pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants in the United States.

3. Protect human dignity and due process in deportation and border enforcement practices. Vulnerable individuals, especially children and asylum seekers, should be sheltered in nonrestrictive environments and never in detention facilities. For those who are detained, due process would reduce the time children are separated from their working parents and would reduce the number of families who fall into poverty.⁸

- From 2004 to 2010, over 160,000 undocumented immigrants were deported without having an opportunity to defend themselves in court.⁹
- In 2016, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents did not follow their own prosecutorial discretion guidelines 51 percent of the time.¹⁰
- To ensure effective oversight and accountability of border enforcement, we recommend regular public reports that assesses the efficacy and impact of ICE and U.S. Customs and Border Patrol activities on border communities.

Conclusion

We urge Congress to embrace smarter immigration and border enforcement policy. This should include funding for programs that address push factors of migration from Central America; a reasonable pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants; and effective oversight and accountability of border enforcement practices and personnel, in any border enforcement funding bill.

Endnotes

¹ Department of Homeland Security Appropriations, Bill 2017. 114th Congress, 2d session. Senate. Calendar No. 501. Report 114-264. Library of Congress. May 26, 2016. NOTE: The \$11 billion appropriated for border enforcement and security includes funding for physical barriers, personnel, and other operations. <https://www.congress.gov/114/crpt/srpt264/CRPT-114srpt264.pdf>

² U.S. Customs and Border Protection, “Southwest Border Migration FY2018,” December 2017, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration#>.

³ Carla N. Argueta, “Border Security: Immigration Enforcement Between Ports of Entry,” Congressional Research Service, April 19, 2016, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homsec/R42138.pdf>.

⁴ Andriana Beltran, “What’s in the Fiscal Year 2017 Spending Package for Central America?” WOLA, May 15, 2017. <https://www.wola.org/analysis/whats-fiscal-year-2017-spending-package-central-america/>.

⁵ Marlysa D. Gamblin, Jordan Teague, “From Hunger to Hunger: Undocumented Immigrants Face Hunger on Both Sides of the Border,” Bread for the World Institute, June 2017, <http://www.bread.org/sites/default/files/downloads/briefing-paper-undocumented-immigrants-face-higher-poverty-rates-june-2017.pdf>

⁶ Alex Nowrasteh, “The Fiscal Case for a Clean DREAM Act,” The Cato Institute, September 12, 2017. <https://www.cato.org/blog/fiscal-case-clean-dream-act>

⁷ Congressional Budget Office, “The Economic Impact of S. 744, the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act” (2013), available at <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/44346>.

⁸ Gamblin and Teague, “From Hunger to Hunger: Undocumented Immigrants Face Hunger on Both Sides of the Border,” <http://www.bread.org/sites/default/files/downloads/briefing-paper-undocumented-immigrants-face-higher-poverty-rates-june-2017.pdf>

⁹ Jennifer Lee Koh, Jayashri Srikantiah, Karen C. Tumlin, “Deportation Without Due Process,” September 2011. <https://www.nilc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Deportation-Without-Due-Process-2011-09.pdf>.

¹⁰ Transactional Records Action Clearinghouse, Reforms of ICE Detainer Program Largely Ignored by Field Officers, August 9, 2016. <http://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/432/>.