



American Friends Service Committee

American Friends Service Committee statement for the Congressional Record pertaining to the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee – Immigration and Border Security Subcommittee Thursday, March 14, 2013

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is an almost 100-year old faith-based organization grounded in Quaker belief in the dignity and worth of every person. AFSC provides direct legal services and engages in organizing with immigrants and allies along with advocacy and movement building throughout the U.S. We directly support immigrants and refugee workers and their communities to organize themselves, to seek out and raise their issues as a way to affirm their aspirations and needs, and to continue to make contributions to this nation.

Our immigration policy recommendations are grounded in AFSC's history and values as a faith-based organization and in the voices of the communities with whom we are deeply connected. We believe that the basis of U.S. immigration policy should be the protection of human rights and equal opportunity, not structures that result in the forced separation of families and communities. Humane immigration policy must recognize the distinctly important and valuable role of family ties by supporting reunification of immigrant and migrant families.

Today, approximately 9 million people live in mixed immigration status families that include U.S. born children and unauthorized immigrants. These families live in fear of long-term separation because of harsh immigration laws that pull family units apart. The permanent resident visa system is based on an obsolete framework that arbitrarily caps the number of visas available each year without regard to needs of family reunification or current economic realities. The current policy serves to increase the size of the undocumented population, as many immigrants – especially women – join their families before eligibility to submit applications for residence in order to avoid long family separations lasting up to ten years.

AFSC offers the following policy recommendations:

- Allocate additional visas to eliminate the years-long delay for those awaiting visas and expedite the processing of pending visa applications;
- Meet the global demand of immigrants to be reunited with their families by eliminating the cap on the total number of family-based visas available;
- Eliminate harsh obstacles to immigrating, including prohibitions on returning to the U.S. based on prior immigration history, past criminal records, and high-income requirements for immigrant sponsors;
- Provide the same benefits to same-gender partners that are available to heterosexual partners;
- Allow applications to be filed from within the U.S. so that families are not separated due to consular processing requirements.
- End arrests, detention, and deportation of immigrants.

AFSC urges the Committee to exert visionary leadership and to support new immigration policies that respect the human rights and equal economic opportunity of all in our communities. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.