



Committee on Migration

c/o Migration and Refugee Services, USCCB

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January 17, 2023

Dear Representative,

I write to you on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Migration to express our opposition to H.R. 29, the "Border Safety and Security Act of 2023." If enacted, this legislation would sever access to protection for vulnerable persons on the move, including asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, victims of torture, and victims of human trafficking who are fleeing life-threatening situations. The bill is antithetical to our nation's moral principles, contrary to U.S. refugee law, and would cause the United States to violate its international obligations. Therefore, we urge you to vote against H.R. 29, as well as any subsequent legislative proposals that would unjustly deprive vulnerable persons of the legal right to seek humanitarian protection in the United States.

The USCCB recognizes the right of the United States to maintain its borders, and we are committed to working with the Administration and members of Congress from all parties to devise an approach to border management that respects human life and dignity. However, we remain opposed to the current implementation of Title 42 along our southwest border. The Border Safety and Security Act would codify the dangerous and counterproductive policy indefinitely, while detaching it completely from any public health rationale. Most concerning is that the bill effectively expands the policy without any exceptions for those with bona fide asylum claims, unaccompanied children, victims of torture, and victims of trafficking. Protections for these populations are delineated in the Refugee Act of 1980, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, and its successors, as well as the 1967 Protocol to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Convention Against Torture, to which the United States is a signatory. Moving forward with this piece of legislation would exacerbate the harm faced by vulnerable persons, while also failing to meaningfully address the root causes of migration and the unsustainable conditions at our southwest border—not only will the challenges we face persist, people will suffer. We must remain true to our laws and our nation's proud tradition of offering safety and opportunity to those who have lost everything besides hope for a better future.

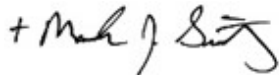
As Catholics, we believe in the fundamental teaching that we are all created in the image and likeness of God, who calls on us to welcome and protect others as we would him: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). On January 1, 2023, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, and World Day of Peace, Pope Francis [called](#) on us to "learn the language of love, which is to take care... take care of our neighbors, of those whom the Lord has placed alongside us, as well as our brothers and sisters who are in need and call for our attention and our compassion." Further, the Holy Father reminded us that as we usher in a new year, hoping that things will change, we should instead ask

ourselves where we want to go and who it is that we can help. This fresh start is a renewed opportunity for Congress to act courageously and address the urgent need for a just, forward-looking, and comprehensive reform of our country's immigration system.

In March 2022, the USCCB's Administrative Committee issued a [statement](#) regarding migrants and refugees, calling for such a reform. It reminded that at the forefront of our thoughts and actions there must always be the truth that each person, including the newcomer, is a brother or sister to us all and a blessing to welcoming communities when given the opportunity to integrate. We must acknowledge and respect not only the inherent dignity of migrants but also embrace their potential and contributions. Finally, the Committee called on us to "reject the contemporary forces of division that tempt us with a false choice between our security and our humanity. Our great nation is capable of safeguarding both our humanity and our security."

Just as the Statue of Liberty has stood tall for nearly 100 years, guiding to our shores generations of "huddled masses yearning to breathe free," we urge you to stand firm now in voting against H.R. 29 and defending the longstanding values that have made this country a beacon of hope for so many throughout the world.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark J. Seitz".

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

CC: All U.S. Representatives