

**STATEMENT OF
THE REVEREND DERRICK HARKINS, PASTOR,
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MEMBER, CHRISTIANS FOR COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM
HEARING OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP,
REFUGEES, BORDER SECURITY, AND INTERNATIONAL LAW
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
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Chairperson Lofgren, Ranking Member King, and members of the Subcommittee: I am The Reverend Doctor Derrick Harkins, Pastor of the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church. Founded in 1839 and with roots extending to 1802, it was the first African-American Baptist congregation, and is one of the most historic houses of worship in the District of Columbia.

In my capacity as a pastor, as well as because of my participation with Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, I have been able to assess and contribute to the discussion of one of the most imperative issues of our time, the status of the immigration system within the United States of America.

The immigration system in America is beyond being broken, it is in crisis. Because this crisis is not simply one limited to issues of documentation and border enforcement, but because it is a crisis that is tearing at the very fabric of individuals, families, and communities, it is one that the church is, in my opinion, compelled to address.

The Hebrew Prophet Micah declared that the Divine expectation of the faithful is to “do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.” We take in part, from that mandate, the understanding of bringing both justice and compassion to circumstances of human need. And also we understand the need to soberly, humbly, and prayerfully consider the response from the church to this crisis in order that far more light than heat is added to the present dialogue and subsequent solutions.

It is fully appropriate for the church, the faith community, to take its place in the public square, and without regard for partisan politics, seek transformative spiritual and social change. Contrary to the opinions of any given television commentators, this does not represent “the conflation of religion and politics for political adventurism,” it is one of the very things we must do to lay claim to our Biblical mandate.

I commend the Congress as you begin the “heavy lifting” of crafting legislation that is fair and comprehensive, that keeps our Nation secure, and that preserves family values as well as strengthening the economic and social fabric of our society.

But I also come to you today with a pastor’s heart, and with the deeply held concern that any laws enacted consider the very American tradition of compassion.

Family, in its strongest and most stable structure is an essential pillar of our society. Within the church the institution of family is supported, encouraged, and applauded. In my own congregation, I see again and again, and am truly thankful for the examples of family strength and values in the homes and lives of those who have immigrated to the United States.

The growing vitality of the church is due in large measure to the presence of the immigrant community. According to Dr. Todd Johnson of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. “The immigrant Evangelical church is growing rapidly in the U.S. and around the world. Among Evangelicals in the United States, the fastest growing are found among the independent immigrant churches.”

The limitation of family based immigration, by the reduction of family reunification visas would impair that family structure in significant measure. Siblings, adult children, and parents (those directly affected by any potential reduction) are in many examples, and cultural contexts, core and not merely “extended” family. It is also important to note here the idea of “chain” immigration is without basis. The concept asserting that immigrants sponsor an uncontrollable number of family members. In reality, only immigrants who have already gained legal permanent residency or U.S. citizenship are able to sponsor relatives. Within the present system an average of 1.2 family members are sponsored.

It is within the structure of families that immigration reform can wield the most enduring benefits. Through a process of restitution, integration into the larger community, and a pathway to earned citizenship we will do away with what is now in great part, a de facto amnesty, which has kept millions of hard working individuals who wish to become productive law-abiding members of our society in the shadows, and has prevented numerous families from being fully intact and stable to society’s benefit.

In addition let me say that many within the historically African-American church have made their voices heard in support of comprehensive immigration reform. Like the overwhelming majority of all Americans, African-American voters support immigration reform that includes enforcement and a path to citizenship. It is the legitimate continuing legacy of the Civil Rights struggle and part of the very nature of the African American church that one should speak for those who have no voice, advocate for those who have no power, and stand for those who are not represented. But yet with a fair and compassionate earned pathway to citizenship, those who are now in the shadows will be able to speak, be empowered, and stand for themselves.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak before your Subcommittee today, and look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform Joint Statement of Principles

Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform represents a coalition of Christian organizations, churches, and leaders from across the theological and political spectrum united in support of comprehensive immigration reform. Despite our differences on other issues, we are working together to see comprehensive immigration reform enacted this year because we share a set of common moral and theological principles that compel us to love and care for the stranger among us, including the following:

- We believe that all people, regardless of national origin, are made in the "image of God" and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect (Genesis 1:26-27, 9:6).
- We believe there is an undeniable biblical responsibility to love and show compassion for the stranger among us (Deuteronomy 10:18-19, Leviticus 19:33-34, Matthew 25:31-46).
- We believe that immigrants are our neighbors, both literally and figuratively, and we are to love our neighbors as ourselves and show mercy to neighbors in need (Leviticus 19:18, Mark 12:31, Luke 10:25-37).
- We believe in the rule of law, but we also believe that we are to oppose unjust laws and systems that harm and oppress people made in God's image, especially the vulnerable (Isaiah 10:1-4, Jeremiah 7:1-7, Acts 5:29, Romans 13:1-7).

The current U.S. immigration system is broken and now is the time for a fair and compassionate solution. We think it is entirely possible to protect our borders while establishing a viable, humane, and realistic immigration system, one that is consistent with our American values and increases national security while protecting the livelihood of Americans. The biblical principles above call us to support comprehensive immigration reform legislation that includes the following elements:

- Border enforcement and protection initiatives that are consistent with humanitarian values while allowing the authorities to enforce the law and implement American immigration policy;
- Reforms in our family-based immigration system that reduce the waiting time for separated families to be safely reunited and maintain the constitutionally guaranteed rights of birthright citizenship and the ability of immigrants to earn naturalization;
- An opportunity for all immigrant workers and their families already in the U.S. to come out of the shadows and pursue the option of an earned path towards permanent legal status and citizenship upon satisfaction of specific criteria;
- A viable guest worker program that creates legal avenues for workers and their families to enter our country and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights and due process fully protected and provides an option for workers to maintain legal status independent of an employer sponsor; and
- A framework to examine and ascertain solutions to the root causes of migration, such as economic disparities between sending and receiving nations.

Immigration reform that incorporates these elements, rejects anti-immigrant and nativist measures, and strengthens our American values will enrich the vitality of America and

advance the common good. We stand together in calling upon President Bush and Congress to seek humane and holistic immigration reform within this legislative year.