



Religious Action Center **of Reform Judaism**

*The Religious Action Center
pursues social justice
and religious liberty
by mobilizing the American
Jewish community and
serving as its advocate
in the nation's capital.*

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Center operates under
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Statement by Rabbi Scott Sperling, Director, Union for Reform Judaism's Mid-Atlantic Regional Council, at an Interfaith Press Conference in Support of Comprehensive Immigration Reform

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As American Jews, we recognize the need for a generous, fair and non-discriminatory immigration policy. For over 350 years, Jews have sought freedom and opportunity on America's shores, and many continue to do so today. As a community, we are especially aware that generous immigration policies have benefited Jews fleeing persecution and economic hardship, and we remember painfully the times when these policies have been unfairly restrictive. Having struggled to adjust to a society that did not always welcome our arrival, we understand some of the challenges faced by today's immigrants as well as the need for a firm commitment to our nation's security.

In addition to our historic experience, our tradition also demands of us concern for the stranger in our midst. The Torah contains over 36 references to this principle, including Leviticus' command, "When strangers sojourn with you in your land, you shall not do them wrong. The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" [19:33-34]. Throughout two millennia of diaspora and disenfranchisement, Jews have clung to this principle, which permeates not only our religious tradition but the American legal tradition as well.

As both Americans and Jews, we keep this principle in mind as we face the reality of the eight to twelve million undocumented migrants currently living in the United States, and the hundreds of thousands attempting to come each year. Experience has shown that tightening security at the border alone will not work, as long as thousands of people are still desperate to enter this country to work or to be reunited with loved ones. We need real solutions to the problems that plague our nation's immigration system, not just cosmetic fixes.

What would those solutions entail? Like many others in the faith community, as well as members of the labor, business, and legal communities, we believe that a program of earned legalization for undocumented migrants already living in the U.S. would provide an appropriate alternative to programs aimed primarily at detaining and deporting eight to twelve million people.

A program of earned legalization for hard-working, undocumented migrants already contributing to this country would encourage many people to come out of the shadows and cooperate with law enforcement, thereby improving domestic security. It would also serve the needs of our economy by meeting demands for essential workers and by integrating millions of workers into the above-ground economy, broadening the tax base.

In addition to advocating for a program of earned legalization, we applaud Senator Arlen Specter's support of proposals to address the backlog in family-based immigration. Currently, U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents often wait many years to be reunited with immediate family members—this situation is not only inhumane, it also contributes to the alarming flow of illegal migration.

From the across the denominational and political spectrum, many American Jews have raised their voices in support of these programs because we understand that, when combined with strict but humane border protection policies and safe, legal avenues for workers and their families wishing to migrate to the U.S., a truly comprehensive approach to immigration reform is the best way to address the problems our nation's immigration system faces. As people of faith, as inheritors of an immigrant history, and—for many of us—as immigrants ourselves, we urge our nation's leaders to enact a program of comprehensive immigration reform.

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The **Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism** is the Washington office of the **Union for Reform Judaism**, whose more than **900 congregations** across North America encompass **1.5 million Reform Jews**, and the **Central Conference of American Rabbis**, whose membership includes more than **1800 Reform rabbis**.