Letter on Comprehensive Immigration Reform
Sent to members of the Senate Judiciary Committee and Senate Leadership

February 22, 2006

Dear Senator:

With the Senate preparing to begin consideration of legislation to address the complex problem of undocumented migration to the United States, we are writing to urge you to take a comprehensive approach to these difficult issues. The Senate's leadership on immigration reform is crucial if the unfortunate approach taken late last year in the House of Representatives is not to be repeated. The House legislation has continued the decades-old failed strategy of expanding enforcement without reforming our nation's immigration laws to realistically serve our security, economic and humanitarian interests.

As leaders of Jewish community organizations, we look both to the teachings of our Jewish religious and ethical tradition, and to core American values relating to immigrants, for guidance on immigration reform. They call on us to "welcome the stranger," and provide an effective legal immigration system characterized by rule of law, national interest and compassionate treatment.

A comprehensive approach to immigration reform must recognize and respond to the reality that approximately 11 million undocumented individuals currently reside in the United States; that unrealistic immigration laws and ineffective border enforcement policies have created conditions that have resulted in thousands of deaths and increasing violence in the border regions; and that extensive backlogs for family immigration visas have led to prolonged and inhumane separation of families. Furthermore, the failure to reform our immigration laws perpetuates an illegal immigration system and undermines government efforts to target enforcement resources on criminals and terrorists who pose grave dangers to the country.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform legislation that results from Senate deliberation should include provisions that provide:

- Border protection policies that are consistent with American humanitarian values and effective against illegal migration, thereby allowing the authorities to carry out the critical task of identifying and preventing entry into the United States of terrorists and dangerous criminals;
- Opportunities for hard-working immigrants who are already contributing to this country to come out of the shadows, regularize their status upon satisfaction of reasonable criteria and, over time, pursue an option to become lawful permanent residents and eventually United States citizens;
- Reforms in our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting times for separated families, who currently must wait many years, to be reunited with loved ones; and
- Legal avenues for workers and their families who wish to migrate to the U.S. to enter our country and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights fully protected.

We firmly believe that with your leadership, the Senate can review and ensure that our country's immigration laws are reformed in a comprehensive manner that will make the United States stronger and safer while honoring our tradition as a nation of immigrants.

Sincerely,

National Organizations:

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