Dear Senator:

We, the undersigned faith-based organizations, write to ask for your support of an amendment (#1202) to be offered by Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) to "sunset" a provision of S. 1348, the Secure Borders, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Reform Act of 2007, which would establish a merit-based legal immigration system in lieu of a family-based system.

We are deeply concerned that the proposed merit-based program is an untried and untested system which may not serve the best interests of the American public. As constructed, it would limit the ability of family members or low-skilled workers from entering the United States, offering their talents to our country, and living the American dream. Instead, it would favor highly educated and highly skilled workers who may or may not be tied to a job in our economy.

Our primary concern is that this new system would replace a time-honored tradition of recognizing the contributions that immigrant families make to our society and the value of families who have served our nation well for decades. Immigrant families have helped build our nation. They start businesses, strengthen immigrant communities, and invest in their new home country.

The emphasis we place in our immigration law on the reunification of families also makes sense in terms of helping our newcomers adapt to their new home. Family members play a crucial role in one another's lives. Families provide an important safety net, and help each other adjust to their new surroundings by pooling resources and sharing responsibilities, such as caring for children and elderly parents. They take care of one another in times of economic, physical, or emotional hardships, thereby decreasing reliance on government welfare or private charities. Allowing immigrant families to be reunited with their loved ones allows those who work in our country to be more productive members of our society while also contributing to the overall stability of our communities.

Any new system must value families and family ties in a meaningful and practical way. To forsake them in lieu of an untested system skewed toward higher skilled individuals would, in our opinion, be short-sighted and could lead to unintended social consequences for our country. The Obama amendment does not eliminate the merit proposal, but simply would sunset it after five years so that Congress can assess its outcomes and consequences. We believe this is a reasonable amendment and essential, considering the impact this system could have on an untold number of immigrant families and on the future course of our nation.

We ask that you vote in favor of Amendment No. 1202 when it is offered on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

Respectfully,

American Jewish Committee Church World Service, Immigration and Refugee Program Friends Committee on National Legislation Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) Irish Apostolate USA JALSA – the Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action Jewish Council for Public Affairs Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service Mennonite Central Committee, Washington Office National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd National Council of Jewish Women NETWORK. A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby Progressive Jewish Alliance Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops