A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing:
REAL ID Is Not Real Security

Washington, DC – Today, Representative F. James Sensenbrenner (R-WI) introduced legislation – the REAL ID Act - that purports to enhance security through already-failed anti-immigrant proposals. Containing measures that Congress voted to strip from intelligence reform legislation less than two months ago, the REAL ID Act will not make us safer, but in fact will: (1) increase the number of uninsured, unlicensed driver's on our roadways; (2) limit the critical law enforcement utility of Department of Motor Vehicle databases; (3) make it extraordinarily difficult for people fleeing persecution to obtain refuge in the United States; (4) undermine our fundamental commitment to free speech and association; and, (5) waste valuable resources, both economic and environmental, on false border security solutions.

"Congress, when it passed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, recognized that provisions broadly and unfairly targeting all immigrants do nothing to contribute to our nation's security," stated Jeanne Butterfield, Executive Director of the American Immigration Lawyers Association. "Yet the ink is barely dry on the intelligence reform legislation and we are already seeing a fresh push to pass these discredited measures under the guise of national security."

The 9/11 Commissioners themselves noted that the "controversial" provisions in question had little to do with national security and were "more central to the question of immigration policy than they are to the question of counterterrorism." For example, asylum applicants already undergo more probing security checks than any other applicants for admission to this country. So while the REAL ID Act's proposal to heighten asylum eligibility standards will not enhance security, it would surely mean that deserving asylum applicants are returned to face the persecution they fled. Similarly, the REAL ID Act's proposal to limit driver's license eligibility for immigrants will not strengthen national security; indeed, it would not have even prevented any of the 9/11 hijackers from obtaining valid licenses. A cornerstone of counterterrorism strategy is the collection of accurate information on people residing is in the U.S. Limiting driver's license eligibility eliminates an important opportunity to screen and record data on a large number of people residing in this country, thereby undermining rather than furthering our national security.

"We all agree that our immigration system is broken. However, making immigrants the problem is not the solution," continued Butterfield. "Instead, we need comprehensive immigration reform that will legalize hard-working immigrants and regularize the flow of workers across our borders so that our government can focus its resources on those who mean us harm. Bringing immigrants out of the shadows and making legality the norm at our borders will achieve far more in terms of security than proposals that drive immigrants further underground."

"America's immigration system needs to be reformed so that immigration is legal, safe, orderly, and reflective of the needs of American families, businesses, and national security. Real security comes from real immigration reform," concluded Butterfield.

# # #

Founded in 1946, AILA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that provides its Members with continuing legal education, information, and professional services. AILA advocates before Congress and the Administration and provides liaison with the DHS and other government agencies. AILA is an Affiliated Organization of the American Bar Association.

43pr5001 A Wolf in Sheep