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Michigan's Catholic Bishops Urge Immigrant Support

Michigan's seven Catholic bishops issue a statement Wednesday calling on state lawmakers to reject legislation that would compromise the dignity of immigrants.

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LANSING, -- Michigan's seven Catholic bishops are calling for more support for immigrants here illegally in a statement being sent to Catholics across the state and elected officials. The statement issued Wednesday says it's "unfair and mistaken" to blame such immigrants for problems more accurately attributed to what it calls "a failed federal policy." The bishops want Michigan lawmakers to reject state legislation that would compromise the dignity of immigrants or tear apart families. They're also urging the state's congressional delegation to pass federal bills offering a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants. The policy statement was sent out by Detroit Archbishop Allen Vigneron and bishops Bernard Hebda of Gaylord, Walter Hurley of Grand Rapids, Paul Bradley of Kalamazoo, Earl Boyea of Lansing, Alexander Sample of Marquette and Joseph Cistone of Saginaw.

Below is the statement issued by the Michigan Bishops:

Michigan Roman Catholic Bishops' Statement on Immigration July 19, 2011

We, the Roman Catholic Bishops in Michigan, bring our voices as teachers of the faith to the ongoing public debate over immigration policy. We do so with deep concern about the effectiveness of the nation's immigration system and the lack of a consistent federal policy that addresses the common good for all peoples in the country.

We support the positive impact migrant communities have made in our country, and especially in our state. We recognize the right of our country to regulate its own borders to control immigration. We believe that borders must be regulated with justice and mercy as people have a God-given right to migrate when necessary to sustain their lives and their families. We empathize with those children born in the United States who later see their parents deported while the children are still minors. We realize that an ineffective immigration system has in some places and at some times led to negative ramifications, such as increased crime and a proliferation of the drug trade.

While these national immigration problems must be resolved, it is unfair and mistaken to

blame the undocumented for problems more accurately attributed to a failed policy. The federal government has the responsibility to enact and enforce laws that treat migrant peoples with the same dignity as its native-born citizens. As such, there must be a concerted effort to find a pathway toward citizenship for undocumented persons who live here, who work here, have raised a family here and have contributed to the common good.

Because Congress has yet to develop a comprehensive immigration policy, the reality is that state legislatures are attempting to address this issue. We acknowledge the state's authority to enact its own legislation; however, continued failure at the federal level to enact comprehensive immigration reform does not mean that the state should pursue policies more appropriately addressed by national immigration authorities and the United States Congress. Should our state policy-makers debate immigration legislation we, as moral leaders and teachers of faith, believe any proposed measure must strive to:

- Uphold the human dignity of all persons and work against any injustice which would compromise the dignity of immigrants.
- Promote and give priority to the reunification of families.
- Recognize the rich contribution to the community by those immigrants and migrants who work and live here.

As the national immigration debate lingers, we encourage all Catholics to turn to the rich and long-standing teachings of the Church on immigration and the proper dignity that must be afforded to all human persons. I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Matthew 25:35). We encourage members of the Michigan Legislature to reject measures that impugn immigrants- especially the undocumented; and we encourage the Michigan congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. to contribute to federal efforts that seek to fix the nation's immigration system.

Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron Archbishop of Detroit
Most Reverend Bernard A. Hebda Bishop of Gaylord
Most Reverend Walter A. Hurley Bishop of Grand Rapids
Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley Bishop of Kalamazoo
Most Reverend Earl A. Boyea Bishop of Lansing
Most Reverend Alexander K. Sample Bishop of Marquette
Most Reverend Joseph R. Cistone Bishop of Saginaw

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