

Editorial

Create a way for illegal immigrants to be made whole

Michigan's seven Catholic bishops have called for federal immigration reform and support of undocumented people in statements sent to elected officials and Catholics across the state.

Given the vitriol surrounding the issue of illegal immigration, the bishops took a courageous stand in support of humane and practical policies toward illegal immigrants.

U.S. immigration laws have not only fomented human rights abuses. They've also failed to effectively manage the flow of people across U.S. borders.

While the federal government deported a record nearly 393,000 people during the past year, there are more than 11 million illegal immigrants in the U.S. At that rate, it would take nearly 28 years to deport every illegal immigrant — and that's only if illegal immigration stopped cold.

The cost to deport all could total hundreds of billions.

That money would be better spent creating an earned path to citizenship that would require illegal immigrants to register with the government, pay any unpaid taxes and reasonable fines, pass background checks and learn English, while receiving the same labor protections as other workers. An earned path would make the hiring of immigrants more transparent and regulated.

To be sure, U.S. politicians and citizens have legitimate concerns about illegal immigration, including national security, drug trafficking and maintaining decent wages for

U.S. workers. No one is suggesting that Immigration and Customs Enforcement should not pursue, and deport, people who threaten national security or public safety.

But too often, that's not what's happening. The Obama administration claims it is focusing on the most dangerous criminals but at least half of those deported last year had no record at all, and many of them committed traffic offenses only. A July 31 Free Press column, "Faces of the Crackdown," found that only about a third of those removed since 2007 by ICE's Detroit office had criminal records.

The truth is that most illegal immigrants become integral parts of the U.S. economy, and of the country's social fabric. They're not criminals, but refugees who fled their home countries looking for a better life in America.

The bishops were courageous and correct to call for more practical and humane laws.

Immigration and border regulation are, properly, issues under the province of the federal government. Without national reform, states will continue to debate and enact short-sighted, inhumane and ineffective laws that lead to racial profiling and the harassment of immigrant communities.

P.S. WITH USE of tanning parlors on the increase despite well-publicized skin cancer risks, medical research is suggesting some people may suffer from TAD — tanning addiction disorder. Or spending a tad too much time in the browning bed?