



March 11, 2015

OPPOSE VITTER AMENDMENT TO RESTRICT 14<sup>TH</sup> AMENDMENT

Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, we write to express our very strong opposition to the Vitter amendment to S. 178, the "Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act of 2015." The Vitter amendment seeks to place restrictions on the plain and unequivocal language of the Citizenship Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

In short, for the first time since the end of the Civil War, the Vitter amendment would aim to create two tiers of citizenship – a modern-day caste system – with potentially millions of natural-born Americans being treated as somehow less than entitled to the equal protection of the laws that our nation has struggled so hard to guarantee. The stated purpose of this insidious proposal is to deter unauthorized immigration. But the real purpose in creating a two-tiered group of citizens is something far more divisive and we believe, decidedly un-American.

For years, The Leadership Conference has urged Congress to repair our broken immigration system. We are astonished that instead of taking up a bipartisan approach that could pass both chambers of Congress, the Senate appears poised to vote on a proposal that would undermine our nation's constitutional protections, would fail to significantly address the problem it seeks to solve, and would punish babies for the actions of their parents.

The Constitution's citizenship clause was adopted to prevent exactly the sort of thing that is being proposed by the Vitter amendment. The language of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment was meant to forever settle the question of what makes somebody a U.S. citizen and a citizen of each state, making clear that there can never again be an underclass of Americans living among us.

As Justice John Marshall Harlan said in 1896, in what was a dissent from the infamous decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, but which later became accepted as obvious, our Constitution "neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens." We urge you to remember those words today and to reject this unconscionable amendment.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you have any questions, please contact either of us, or Senior Counsel Rob Randhava, at (202) 466-3311.

Sincerely,

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