



November 18, 2013

Support H.R. 15, the “Border Security, Economic
Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act”

Dear Representative:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, we urge you to support H.R. 15, the “Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act.” H.R. 15 is modeled closely after S. 744, the similarly-named Senate bill that was approved by a solid bipartisan majority earlier this year. Between its 190 cosponsors and the many additional Representatives who have spoken out in favor of its provisions, we are confident that H.R. 15 will have the votes to pass the House. There is simply no principled excuse for Congress to fail to act on this bill.

For many years, comprehensive immigration reform has stood out as one of the highest legislative priorities – and one of the most pressing moral imperatives – of the civil and human rights movement. The task of getting immigration reform right requires a careful and delicate balancing of numerous policy objectives. These objectives must include a roadmap to citizenship for people who are working hard and contributing to our communities, our culture, and our economy; firm and fair enforcement that deters unauthorized immigration but treats individuals with dignity; the upholding of our nation’s longstanding commitment to due process and civil rights; the promotion of family unity and the integration of new Americans; and meeting the needs of employers in a way that protects immigrant and native-born workers alike.

Earlier this year, the Senate produced and passed a legislative package that meets these goals. While we were disappointed that it was amended at the last minute to expand border enforcement in ways that are unnecessary, extraordinarily expensive, and detrimental to the rights of immigrants and citizens alike, the Senate did its job – and did so in a bipartisan fashion that reflects well on our system.

Now it is the House’s turn to act. H.R. 15 closely follows the contours of the “Gang of Eight” proposal that emerged from the Senate Judiciary Committee. While it is not the “perfect” bill, it would make significant improvements that are long overdue, have long had bipartisan support, and would significantly advance the civil and human rights of both immigrants and citizens alike:

- H.R. 15 would put millions of hardworking, deserving unauthorized immigrants on a road to citizenship, enabling them to fully share in the American dream and put an end to their second-class legal status.
- It would finally enact the DREAM Act, to allow the full integration of children who had no say in their immigration status – a bill that has long enjoyed bipartisan support and could have easily become law years ago.

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- It would provide drastically improved protections for agricultural guestworkers and other workers recruited from abroad, many of whom currently face some of the harshest and most inhumane labor conditions imaginable in our nation.
- H.R. 15 would greatly improve immigration detention policies which, since 1996, have made a mockery of our most basic constitutional and human rights principles, especially given the growth in the use of the private, for-profit prison industry to lock up immigrants.
- While H.R. 15 would repeal the diversity visa program, it includes provisions – mirroring those in the Senate bill – that we are confident will preserve adequate visa opportunities.
- H.R. 15 would make significant improvements in a number of additional areas, including the reduction of family-based visa backlogs, promoting immigrant integration, removing arbitrary barriers to asylum, and gathering data on the use of racial and ethnic profiling.

Poll after poll has shown that the American public supports these sorts of reforms. Our own polling, conducted most recently this year, shows that African-American voters – despite their concerns about the current state of the economy – strongly share this position. We found that 66 percent of respondents support comprehensive immigration reform that includes increased border security, penalties on employers of illegal workers, and criteria for a path to citizenship, with only 16 percent opposing such reforms. Moreover, 72 percent have a favorable impression of immigrants, with 68 percent believing they contribute to our economy and communities.¹ In the coming weeks and months, we intend to continue building upon this support in favor of comprehensive reform.

The time for the House to act on H.R. 15 is now. We urge you to cosponsor H.R. 15, if you have not done so already, and to press the House leadership to allow it to come up for a vote. We are confident that H.R. 15 will have the votes to pass.

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,

Wade Henderson
President & CEO

Nancy Zirkin
Executive Vice President

¹ Polling conducted by Lake Research Partners, for The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights & The Leadership Conference Education Fund, March 25-30, 2013, among 805 African-American likely voters. The results are consistent with similar polling conducted for us by Lake Research Partners, December 8-17, 2007, among 700 African-American voters.