



Committee on Migration

c/o Migration and Refugee Services, USCCB

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March 5, 2018

Dear Senator:

As a Church at the service of all God's people, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) stands ready to work with the leaders of both parties to protect impoverished and marginalized people, promote human life and dignity, and advance the common good. As Congress contemplates the end of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 appropriations process and the beginning of that process for FY 2019, many USCCB policy offices either have already expressed, or will later express their views on appropriations matters under their purview. Together, these views represent the breadth of concern of the bishops in the budget and appropriations process. Today, I write on behalf of the USCCB Committee on Migration to request your support for our funding priorities with respect to several federal accounts, programs, and activities that are crucial for immigrants, refugees, unaccompanied children, and trafficking victims. I ask that as you finalize FY 2018 funding levels and begin your consideration of funding for FY 2019, please consider the following requests:

Refugee Protection

Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

We ask that Congress appropriate **\$1.901 billion** in FY 2019 for the Refugee Entrant and Assistance (REA) account, an amount we believe would enable the Department of Health and Human Service Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to adequately serve all the vulnerable populations and respond to unanticipated needs. The REA account helps states and local communities welcome and support refugees and other populations on their path to self-sufficiency. ORR also serves unaccompanied children, asylees, Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) recipients, Cuban and Haitian entrants, victims of human trafficking, and victims of torture. ORR serves up to 200,000 newly arrived individuals annually.

State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

We ask that Congress appropriate **\$3.604 billion for the Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account, \$50 million for the Department's Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) account, and \$3.883 billion for the International Disaster Assistance (IDA)** that is administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID), amounts we believe would ensure that State and USAID can continue to service currently displaced populations while responding to numerous humanitarian crises.

The MRA account funds the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. This account provides overseas assistance to displaced refugees and funding lifesaving services in humanitarian emergencies, while stabilizing refugee host countries in sensitive regions. Escalating violence in many parts of the world underscores the urgent need for the ERMA account—an emergency draw-down account that provides an important “safety valve” during emergencies. IDA account funds humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons. Meeting the needs of internally displaced persons is one way to prevent them from fleeing their countries of origin and becoming refugees.

Protection of Unaccompanied Children

Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

For FY 19, within the \$1.901 billion level of funding that we suggest for the HHS REA account, we ask that Congress appropriate **\$948 million** to serve unaccompanied children. ORR provides custody and care, shelter, and support services to these children apprehended in the U.S by the Department of Homeland Security. We urge overall funding be utilized for continued family reunification efforts. We note the additional \$206 million above the FY 2019 funding that is requested to meet potential increased demand. We welcome this funding and preparation efforts, but urge that such funding not be utilized for large-scale shelters nor efforts to separate children from their parents as a deterrence strategy. Such funding should focus on smaller individualized shelters that comport with child welfare principles as well as transitional and long-term foster care placements. Additionally, for FY 2018 we welcome the additional \$686 million requested by the Administration for provision of care to unaccompanied children, however we urge similar large-scale shelter and family separation restrictions on such funding.

Combating Human Trafficking and Protecting Survivors

Labor, Health and Human Services and Education

Within the \$1.694 billion level of funding that we suggest for the REA account, we ask Congress to appropriate **\$40 million** for Office of Trafficking in Persons (OTIP), in the form of \$20 million to foreign national victims' protection and \$20 million to protection of U.S. citizen victims. We also ask Congress to appropriate **\$91 million** for the Department of Labor International Labor Affairs Bureau (ILAB). OTIP oversees the care and treatment of all U.S. citizen and foreign national trafficking victims in the United States. OTIP identifies and serves trafficking victims and provides specialized case management. ILAB plays a critical role in efforts to eradicate child labor and address forced labor. Through its reports, ILAB plays a major role in monitoring and reporting on labor practices in countries around the world.

State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

We ask that Congress appropriate **\$24 million** for the Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Person Office (J/TIP) for combatting human trafficking. J/TIP needs additional resources to ensure that it can administer anti-trafficking programming and research.

Department of Homeland Security

We ask that Congress appropriate **\$5 million** to enable Border Patrol agents to identify and protect child trafficking victims. The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 requires CBP to screen children it encounters for indicators that they are trafficking victims. The funds we suggest be appropriated could be used for orientation, training, and hiring child welfare experts.

Immigration Enforcement

Department of Homeland Security

The President's FY 2019 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Budget in Brief suggests allocating **\$5.6 billion** in additional funding for programs to implement the January 25, 2017, Executive Orders on Border Security and Immigration Enforcement. Specifically, the Budget requests:

- **\$1.6 billion** for costs associated with the construction of 65 miles of new wall in Rio Grande Valley sector;
- **\$780 million** to recruit, hire, and train 750 new Border Patrol Agents and 2,000 new Immigration and Customs Enforcement law enforcement personnel in FY 2019;
- **\$3.266 billion** for expanded detention, transportation, and removal capabilities; and

- Expansion of immigrant detention bed capacity from approximately **39,000 to 52,000**.

The Catholic Church acknowledges the right of nations to control their borders and governments' responsibility to protect the people within their borders. At the same time, we believe that those rights and responsibilities should be exercised in a manner that is consistent with their moral obligation to protect the humanitarian needs of migrants and refugees. Wealthier nations have a stronger obligation to accommodate those needs and can do so in a manner that does not jeopardize the safety of their people.

We oppose shifting resources away from accommodating humanitarian needs and toward the enforcement priorities proposed by the Administration for FY 2019. We believe the priorities enunciated in the Administration's FY 2019 budget submission would constitute a further, unnecessary and dangerous security buildup on the U.S./Mexico border and would cause an extreme increase in the use of immigrant detention. We do not believe such an enforcement-only approach is appropriate. Moreover, we do not believe that such resources need to be or should be invested in the type of border wall proposed by the Administration or in more detention facilities. Instead, we believe that some of this funding should be dedicated to more humane and economical programs, such as alternatives to detention programs that utilize case management; legal services; and safe voluntary repatriation programs. As such, we welcome the allocation of \$184 million to Alternatives to Detention programs, but note that such funding should be increased in lieu of immigrant detention funding. We especially note disappointment at the cancellation of the Family Case Management Program, which provided a community-based support alternative to detention for vulnerable immigrant families, primarily women and their children.

Other Important Immigration Priorities

Department of Homeland Security

We note that the FY 2018 Continuing Resolution extended the expiring Special Immigrant Non-Minister Religious Worker Visa program until March 23, 2018. We ask that Congress include language that would permanently reauthorize this small program in any bill appropriating funds for DHS for FY 2019. We also ask that Congress include in the DHS portion of any appropriations vehicle it passes a Hyde-like provision to ensure that federal funds not be used to fund elective abortions.

Commerce Justice Science and Related Agencies

The President's FY 2019 Budget requests an additional **\$40 million** to support an additional 75 Immigration Judges. We urge you to accommodate this request.

We also ask that Congress appropriate **\$50 million** for Administrative Review and Appeals Executive Office of Immigration Review (APA/EOIR) to expand the pilot program for legal representation and leverage federal funds to bolster pro bono efforts and improve immigration court efficiency. And finally, we ask that Congress appropriate **\$40 million** to expand the APA/EOIR Legal Orientation Program (LOP) and the Legal Orientation Program for Custodians of Unaccompanied Children (LOPC). We suggest this funding include **\$25 million** for the LOP and **\$15 million** for the LOPC as this effort streamlines immigration court proceedings.

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joe S. Vásquez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J" and "V".

Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez, Bishop of Austin
Chair, Committee on Migration
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops