



Committee on Migration

c/o Migration and Refugee Services, USCCB

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Dear Representatives:

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 marginalized people, promote human life and dignity, and advance the common good. As Congress begins the appropriations process for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, many USCCB policy offices will engage on appropriations matters under their purview. Combined, 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 and programs that are crucial for immigrants, refugees, unaccompanied children, and trafficking victims. As you develop FY 2020 funding proposals, please consider the following requests:

Commerce Justice and Science and Related Agencies (CJS)

The President's FY 2020 Budget requests **\$71.1 million** for an additional **100 Immigration Judge teams and support staff**. Given the pending case load of over 850,000, we urge you to accommodate this request.

We also ask that Congress appropriate **\$50 million** for the 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, we ask that Congress appropriate **\$55 million** to expand the Legal Orientation Program, the Legal Orientation Program for Custodians of Unaccompanied Children, and the Information Court Helpdesk Program. These programs not only provide crucial legal information to those in immigration court proceedings but also streamline proceedings, making them more efficient.

Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

The President's FY 2020 DHS Budget in Brief makes the following requests:

- \$5 billion toward construction of a wall on the border of the U.S. and Mexico;
- \$506 million to hire 2,800 new staff for Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); and
- \$2.7 billion for 54,000 detention beds, and an additional unspecified level of funding through the "Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Fund" to, among other things, expand detention capacity to 60,000 beds, including 10,000 beds for families.

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 the 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 citizens.

We believe the priorities enunciated in the Administration's FY 2020 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 funding should be invested in the border wall proposed by the Administration or in increased detention capacity. 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. Accordingly, we commend the \$30.5 million provided for in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2019 that will, over two years, fund the Family Case Management Program (FCMP), which provides a community-based alternative to detention for vulnerable immigrant families, primarily women and their children. **For FY 2020, we request a minimum of a 50% increase over the amount already allocated to the FCMP in the FY 2019 agreement.**

We appreciate that the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2019 extended the expiring Special Immigrant Non-Minister Religious Worker Visa program until September 30, 2019. We ask that Congress include language that would permanently reauthorize this program in any bill appropriating funds for DHS for FY 2020. 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.

Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS)

We ask that Congress appropriate a baseline of **\$2.565 billion** in FY 2020 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 certain vulnerable populations of concern and respond to unanticipated needs. ORR serves refugees, unaccompanied children, asylees, Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) recipients, Cuban and Haitian entrants, and survivors of human trafficking and of torture.

Within the \$2.565 billion level of funding that we suggest for the REA account, **we ask Congress to appropriate \$40 million for the Office of Trafficking in Persons (OTIP), with \$20 million for foreign national victims' protection and \$20 million to protect U.S. citizen victims.** OTIP provides critical services and case management to trafficking victims and facilitates their path to recovery and self-sufficiency. We commend last year's increase to \$19 million for foreign-born victims as a positive step, and we urge these further increases to avoid funding shortfalls. We also ask Congress to appropriate **\$86.125 million for the Department of Labor International Labor Affairs Bureau (ILAB)**, the same level appropriated for ILAB in FY 2019. ILAB plays a critical role in efforts to eradicate child labor and address forced labor.

Within the topline funding that we recommend for the REA account, we also ask that Congress appropriate at least **\$1.8 billion to serve unaccompanied children (UC)**. This would be a small increase above actual UC expenditures in FY 2018, which included an enacted level of \$1.3 billion plus \$463 million in expenditures funded by transfers and use of a discretionary fund. Comparable spending has already occurred this year with the HHS Secretary recently reporting to Congress a transfer of \$385 million for FY 2019 UC expenditures. With this funding, we urge ORR to dedicate resources toward serving the best interest of unaccompanied children, prioritizing further expansion of permanent bed capacity, specifically community-based residential care and small-scale shelter capacity, as well as increasing the percent of children receiving family reunification services (that is, home studies and post-release services).

We also support the Administration's request for a \$2 billion contingency fund for unaccompanied children available from FY 2020-2022. While we support the establishment of this contingency fund to serve unaccompanied children, we recommend that \$100 million of the fund be available to ORR to address any similar shortfalls in funding for the other populations served by the REA account. We are aware of numerous instances in the last seven years when reprogramming occurred within ORR comparable to this requested level.

State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS)

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. This would be a substantial increase from \$13.822 million¹, the FY2019 enacted level, but is needed to more fully monitor and combat the global scourge of human trafficking.

We also ask that Congress appropriate **\$3.604 billion for the Department of State’s Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account, \$1 million for the Department’s Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) account, and \$4.5 billion for the International Disaster Assistance (IDA)** that is administered by the United States Agency for International Development Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA). We believe these amounts would ensure that State and USAID can continue a robust U.S. commitment to refugee protection, serving refugees and displaced populations and responding to numerous humanitarian crises. Given the global need, our recommended funding levels for FY 2020 are relatively small increases above FY 2019 enacted levels of \$3.432 billion for MRA and \$4.385 billion for IDA. Further, as the Administration has not made use of the ERMA account, and has even proposed terminating it, the account is full. We urge you to support the ERMA account’s continued existence and use, requesting \$1 million as a sign of Congress’ ongoing commitment to the account.

Finally, the Administration is also proposing a new structure which would combine most funding and operations from IDA, ERMA and Food for Peace into a new International Humanitarian Assistance account to create the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. Both State and USAID would lead the new bureau and would report to the Secretary of State and USAID Administrator. With the proposed restructuring, these combined accounts would be decreased by 33%. Also, under the Administration’s proposal, the funding for PRM, the agency currently charged with overseeing the U.S. refugee admissions program, would be cut by 90% and would no longer be responsible for overseas assistance to refugees. We request the above funding levels and oppose the proposed creation of the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance at this time. Regarding this effort, we note Congress’ current intent to maintain the structure, as stated in the FY2019 SFOPs bill.¹

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,



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

¹ See FY2019 Conference Report to H.R. Resolution 31, Section 7073(b)(3). (“None of the funds appropriated by this Act, prior Acts making appropriations for the Department of State, foreign operations, and related programs, or any other Act may be used to downsize, downgrade, consolidate, close, move, or relocate the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Department of State, or any activities of such Bureau, to another Federal agency.”).