

# Evangelical Immigration Table

July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014

Dear Member of Congress,

In a matter of months, more than 50,000 unaccompanied children have arrived in the United States. Millions of Americans have been moved by the plight of these children who are currently awaiting processing, with many asking how they can help.

Children are vulnerable even in the best of circumstances and warrant special protection beyond that offered to adults. This vulnerability is compounded among children who flee situations of criminal gangs, sexual violence, trauma and extreme poverty, without their parents to accompany them.

Evangelicals are guided by Jesus' admonitions to welcome and protect children (Matthew 18:6, Mark 9:37, Luke 18:15-17). As our nation responds to this humanitarian crisis, we are thankful for laws that protect children and provide for their needs. While our systems are currently stretched, our laws uphold basic child protection principles.

Accordingly, we are concerned about potential weakening of protections afforded by the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) which was enacted in 2008 and reauthorized in 2013. The TVPRA ensures that victims of trafficking are not only identified and screened properly but that traffickers are penalized and brought to justice. It also appropriately assigns responsibility for the care of unaccompanied children to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and ensures that children are placed with their families when possible. By making the legal process clearer and more efficient for children, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops found that since the passage and implementation of TVPRA 23% more children were assisted. The TVPRA is working according to its design. It should not be changed to address the current temporary situation. The law allows for responses to exceptional circumstances.

Additionally, we urge you to provide the necessary resources and policy guidance to address the current crisis, and then hold the Administration accountable for fulfilling its responsibilities under the law. Robust funding is needed for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in HHS which has extensive experience with vulnerable immigrants, including UACs, refugees, and victims of trafficking. To respond to this crisis, ORR is considering reprogramming funding from other refugee programs. Funds must not simply be transferred from one vulnerable population to another. More funding is needed. There should also be increased funding for immigration courts and judges to more quickly screen the children and counsel for children going through legal proceedings so they know their rights and can understand the process. More robust investment in effectively addressing root causes of migration in Central America and Mexico is also imperative.

As we pray for these children and also our nation, we are reminded of Matthew 19:13-14 in which Jesus said, "*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them.*" Churches and faith-based organizations have long partnered with the federal government in serving immigrant children and families in the United States. Many churches and faith-based organizations are ready and committed to provide the same type of assistance and pastoral care in the case of these unaccompanied children.

We offer our prayers and service as you make important decisions about our nation's response to migrant children. We hope that any response you make will strengthen our country's tradition of providing safety and refuge to the vulnerable.

Sincerely,

Leith Anderson, President, National Association of Evangelicals  
Stephan Bauman, President and CEO, World Relief  
David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World  
Noel Castellanos, CEO, Christian Community Development Association  
Russell D. Moore, President, Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission  
William Robinson, Interim President, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities  
Samuel Rodriguez, President, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference  
Gabriel Salguero, President, National Latino Evangelical Coalition  
Richard Stearns, President, World Vision U.S.  
Jim Wallis, President and Founder, Sojourners