

Evangelical Immigration Table

Council for Christian Colleges
and Universities

Ethics and Religious Liberty
Commission of the Southern
Baptist Convention

Korean Churches for
Community Development/Faith
and Community Empowerment

National Association of
Evangelicals

National Hispanic Christian
Leadership Conference

The Wesleyan Church

World Relief

November 1, 2017

Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Elaine Duke
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20016

Dear Acting Secretary Duke,

As leaders serving and representing millions of evangelical Christians through our respective denominations, churches, colleges, universities, and ministries, we are writing to respectfully ask you to consider extending the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designation that has been granted by past administrations for nationals of several countries, including Honduras, Nicaragua, Haiti, and El Salvador, each of which requires your decision to renew or terminate the status within the coming weeks or months. **We believe that reform of the TPS program is needed and warranted. Accordingly, we urge you to extend the TPS designation for Honduras, Nicaragua, Haiti, and El Salvador to provide Congress time to provide needed reforms to the TPS program.**

Our concern is driven by our Christian faith and our commitment to the Scriptures, which speak clearly and frequently to God's concern for those who are vulnerable, specifically including immigrants and the poor. Each of these individuals, from a biblical perspective, is endowed with inherent dignity as a person made in God's image, and each is a neighbor whom Jesus commands us to love. The Bible also teaches us that God has established families as the fundamental building block of healthy societies, and we are concerned with the separation of families that withdrawing TPS at this time would likely entail.

The roughly 300,000 individuals from these four countries who currently are lawfully present under TPS protections each voluntarily came forward at the invitation of the federal government, passed a criminal background check (and in many cases multiple subsequent background checks with each renewal), and have demonstrated that they are economically self-sufficient, as they do not qualify for federal means-test public benefits. They contribute significantly to our national economy, including contributing roughly \$7 billion in Social Security and Medicare taxes over the past decade and much more as consumers, employees in critical sectors of our economy, and entrepreneurs.

These individuals are now firmly established parts of our communities, including many who are members of our local churches and students within our colleges. Most Central Americans granted TPS have been present in the United States for twenty years or more, and they have put down roots here. Most are parents of one or more U.S. citizen children; if these parents were to be deported or simply no longer be authorized to work, it would create a significant strain on these U.S. citizen children and other immediate family members—and on both public and private social support systems for which these citizen children would qualify.

Withdrawal of TPS at this time—without a long-term, legislative resolution of these individuals' situation—would also have a significantly negative impact on the countries to which these immigrants would potentially be returned. Several of

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our organizations operate or support ministries in Central America and/or Haiti, and our colleagues there are deeply concerned about the impact of a withdrawal of TPS on the country as a whole, each of which is facing challenges of poverty and violence.

While the Central American countries were initially designated with TPS status because of natural disasters more than 15 years ago, El Salvador and Honduras have competed in recent years for the ignominious title of the highest civilian homicide rate of any country in the world. Haiti, initially designated with TPS after the horrific earthquake of 2010, has recently been hit by several severe hurricanes. In each of these cases, the countries face chronic unemployment and underemployment, dynamics that would likely be exacerbated by a sudden insertion of residents who have lived abroad for many years, harming the poorest of the poor.

When Congress created the TPS program in 1990, it was envisioned as a way for the federal government to provide safe haven on a temporary basis in situations when returning individuals to a country devastated by natural disaster or manmade violence would be inhumane. Regrettably, many of these countries remain unsafe even after many years. In any case, we are working with Congress to make needed reforms to the TPS program. The situations of long-term recipients of TPS status are complex and demand a legislative solution. We urge you to renew the TPS designation for Honduras, Nicaragua, Haiti, and El Salvador to allow Congress to develop such a solution.

Sincerely,

Leith Anderson, President, National Association of Evangelicals

Scott Arbeiter, President, World Relief

Shirley V. Hoogstra, President, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

Hyepin Im, President & CEO, Korean Churches for Community Development

Jo Anne Lyon, Ambassador, General Superintendent Emerita, The Wesleyan Church

Russell Moore, President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

Samuel Rodriguez, President, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference