

EVANGELICAL IMMIGRATION table.

Bethany Christian Services

April 28, 2020

Council for Christian
Colleges and Universities

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States

Ethics and Religious
Liberty Commission of the
Southern Baptist
Convention

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW.
Washington, DC 20500

Faith and Community
Empowerment

Dear President Trump,

We are writing to express our concerns with the Executive Order that you signed on April 22, significantly restricting legal immigration into the United States, as well as with other ongoing restrictions to lawful immigration processes.

National Association of
Evangelicals

The past few months have been a challenge time for all Americans. We have been praying for you, for your administration and all for governing authorities as you have had to make difficult decisions in order to protect the American people from the effects of COVID-19.

The Wesleyan Church

World Relief

In some cases, temporarily restricting travel into the United States in the interest of limiting the spread of the novel coronavirus was appropriate and prescient, and halting certain immigration processes both in the U.S. and overseas has been necessary to protect both immigrants and the staff of these facilities.

However, as you lead the nation to gradually re-open, we are concerned by these additional restrictions on immigration and by the continued suspension of other legal immigration processes in the absence of a clear plan for re-opening guided by public health considerations. Reducing legal immigration and setting aside laws designed to protect vulnerable people at this time will neither slow the spread of COVID-19 nor speed the economic recovery. Instead, we are concerned that these restrictions will hinder economic growth, contribute to family separation, increase illegal immigration and put vulnerable children and families who have fled persecution at risk of further harm. We urge you to reconsider.

Among other provisions, the Executive Order signed this week restricts the issuance of immigrant visas (“green cards”) to certain family members of U.S. citizens and Lawful Permanent Residents for at least sixty days, with the possibility of extension. This policy change impacts individuals whose U.S.-based parents, adult children or siblings paid governmental fees to file visa petitions years or even decades ago, who have waited patiently to be reunited to their loved ones in the U.S. As international travel resumes, these family-sponsored immigrants represent a very small share of all individuals entering the United

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States lawfully on any given day, and like all new lawful immigrants they are required to undergo a medical exam prior to travel, so singling them out for restriction will not slow the spread of COVID-19. Instead it will deprive naturalized U.S. citizens – including many on the frontlines of fighting COVID-19 in the medical sector – of being reunited to their loved ones at a time when many Americans are keenly aware of the value of family.

We are also concerned with the continued suspension of programs and laws designed to protect individuals who have fled persecution and violence. The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program, which allows persecuted Christians and others who have fled persecution to find safe haven in the U.S., has been halted since March 19. U.S. laws that offer asylum protection to individuals who can demonstrate a credible fear of persecution for particular reasons under the law have also been halted along the U.S.-Mexico border. Our refugee resettlement program and asylum processing should be re-started on a timeline guided by and with accommodations informed by public health best practices, not ideological concerns. We must not allow COVID-19 to serve as a pretext for turning our backs on the vulnerable and persecuted.

Of particular concern, unaccompanied children who have sought protection in the U.S. are not being processed in accordance with the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, a law whose passage evangelical Christians strongly advocated for and which we continue to believe should be respected. While we certainly understand the unique challenges that this public health crisis presents, it is still vital that children be protected from human trafficking and violence. The provisions of the TVPRA, which include transferring children from non-contiguous countries to the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services within 72 hours, must still be followed, even while taking all appropriate public health precautions to protect children, officials of the U.S. government, and our communities.

In enacting some of these new restrictions to lawful immigration processes, you have cited the idea that ongoing legal immigration could somehow hinder economic recovery efforts. We believe that, just as immigrants have played a vital role in [healthcare](#) and throughout [food supply chains](#) during the crisis, immigrants can actually be an integral part of the [economic recovery](#). Immigrants do work, of course, but often in roles that complement the jobs held by U.S. citizens, and they also expand the overall economy as consumers. They also contribute as taxpayers – helping to sustain the unprecedented governmental expenditures necessary to respond to this crisis – and as entrepreneurs, creating new jobs.

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Ultimately, restricting legal immigration tends to increase illegal immigration, and this will likely be exacerbated as COVID-19 has sparked economic crises in other parts of the world that will drive many people living in poverty to consider migration out of desperation. The U.S. certainly cannot take all of these individuals, but to dramatically restrict their legal immigration possibilities will only increase the number who seek to immigrate unlawfully.

As you said in your State of the Union address just over a year ago, “Legal immigrants enrich our nation and strengthen our society in countless ways.” We and many of the evangelical Americans within our denominations, churches and institutions were encouraged by your desire to oversee legal immigration “in the largest numbers ever.” Now, we urge you to stand by that commitment, restoring family-based immigration processes and humanitarian programs that offer legal protections to the most vulnerable.

As always, but particularly at this difficult time for our nation, we are praying that God would grant you wisdom.

Sincerely,

Scott Arbeiter, President, World Relief

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

Hyepin Im, President & CEO, Faith and Community Empowerment

Walter Kim, President, National Association of Evangelicals

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

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

Chris Palusky, President & CEO, Bethany Christian Services