

EVANGELICAL IMMIGRATION table.

April 19, 2023

Dear Members of Congress,

As evangelical leaders, we're writing to encourage you to take two principles into account as you consider legislation to address the significant challenges at the U.S.-Mexico border.

First, we affirm that God has established governments and given them the responsibility of ensuring the safety and wellbeing of their citizens. For this reason, we have long called for immigration policy reforms that ensure secure borders and respect the rule of law. Our federal government has a responsibility to know who is entering the United States, to do whatever is reasonably possible to prevent the entry of anyone seeking to do harm and to enforce laws governing who is and who is not allowed to enter the United States.

Equally important, however, we believe that God has made every human being in His image with inherent dignity. This means that human life is worth protecting, regardless of one's nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender or any other factor.

This belief is at the foundation of our asylum laws, which offer protection to those who reach the United States and can demonstrate a credible fear of persecution for reasons outlined in U.S. law. That does not mean that everyone who reaches the U.S. border should be allowed in, but it does mean that we ensure due process for those seeking asylum under the terms of U.S. law. We ask you to oppose any legislation that in any way undermines due process for asylum seekers.

We also affirm that our government should take extra caution to ensure the wellbeing of those who are uniquely vulnerable. Among the most vulnerable are children identified at the border unaccompanied by a parent or legal guardian, which is why we support vital provisions of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 that govern how unaccompanied children should be treated. Recent reports of unaccompanied children being mistreated even within the United States are upsetting and underscore the need for better safeguards for those in the care of relatives or other sponsors within the United States. We advocate thorough processes to ensure the safety of vulnerable children, rather than sending them back to situations of likely danger abroad.



The conviction that each person is made in God's image also means that even those who may need to be returned to their country of origin under the terms of U.S. law should be treated humanely, acknowledging the dignity God has placed within each person, and respecting the unity of the family, which God has also established.

As pastors and ministry leaders, we urge you to consider these two principles – ensuring secure borders and respecting the God-given dignity of each person – as you legislate, and to oppose proposals that would either make our borders less secure or would erode existing legal protections for those vulnerable to persecution, human trafficking or other significant harm.

Some particular ideas that we believe would be consistent with both of these goals would include:

- Increasing opportunities for legal migration that are accessible without the need to reach the U.S. border to seek asylum, such as by expanding refugee resettlement and employer-sponsored visas, both for those seeking to emigrate permanently and those seeking temporary work opportunities
- Expanding personnel and technology to fully staff ports of entry, both to ensure that asylum requests can be adjudicated without returning individuals to dangerous conditions in the border regions of Mexico and to halt the trafficking of fentanyl and other dangerous drugs, most of which currently enter the U.S. through ports of entry
- Appropriate adequate funds to ensure a fully-staffed Border Patrol with the resources, technology and training necessary to intercept individuals seeking to enter the United States without inspection
- Invest in faith-based and other non-governmental organizations in Mexico, Central America and other parts of the world that are doing effective work to address the root causes of poverty, violence, environmental changes and corruption that lead many to feel they have no option but to leave their homelands and seek a new life in the United States

While the border challenges are significant and require congressional response, we also urge you not to neglect other urgent immigration priorities, such as ensuring opportunities for Dreamers, Afghan and other humanitarian parolees, and long-term beneficiaries of Temporary Protected Status have the opportunity to pursue permanent legal status.

We realize that crafting legislation that respects these principles requires wisdom, and we pray that God will provide it to you in abundance.

Sincerely,

Evangelical Immigration Table Organizations:

Bethany Christian Services

Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

Faith and Community Empowerment

National Association of Evangelicals

National Latino Evangelical Coalition

World Relief

World Vision