

March 21, 2005

Dear Senator:

As community-based organizations serving Latinos, we write to express our strong opposition to the "REAL ID Act" (H.R. 418), legislation introduced by Representative Sensenbrenner and passed by the House of Representatives in February. If enacted, the "REAL ID Act" will have a profound, negative impact on Latinos and other immigrant communities. We strongly urge you to oppose the "REAL ID Act."

All of the major provisions of the "REAL ID Act" are harmful to Latino communities, and the entire bill must be rejected. Specifically:

**The driver's license restrictions in the "REAL ID Act" will not make us safer; they would result in more unlicensed, uninsured drivers on our roads.** The "REAL ID Act" would not have stopped the 9/11 terrorists. The terrorists were in fact issued visas and permitted legal entry into the U.S. They obtained valid driver's licenses using their visas. However, the "REAL ID Act" will result in many drivers being denied licenses, either because they do not meet eligibility requirements, because their immigration documents are caught up in USCIS processing backlogs, or because driver's licensing agents with no expertise or training make mistakes. Immigrants will not return to their home countries because they are denied driver's licenses. Rather, they will drive unlicensed and uninsured, making all of our neighborhoods less safe.

**The driver's license provisions will result in increased discrimination and civil rights abuses.** The "REAL ID Act" would create a multitiered system in which drivers have distinct licenses; U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents would have one type of license, and lawful temporary immigrants would have an easily distinguishable distinct license. It is also possible that undocumented immigrants would have a driver's license that singles them out as well. This type of system opens the door to widespread discrimination and civil rights violations.

**The border fence provisions of the "REAL ID Act" are overbroad, inhumane, and inefficient and will result in increased suffering, violence, and death along the border.** The language is overly broad and would permit any Department of Homeland Security Secretary in the future, at his or her discretion, to build as many military fences as he or she sees fit along the southwestern border. This would not reduce undocumented immigration, but would increase the number of deaths at the border. Since the implementation of Operation Gatekeeper and Hold the Line, migrants have been forced to cross the border in more remote and dangerous areas, and have increasingly relied on human smugglers. Apprehensions in Arizona have skyrocketed, and more than 2,000 migrants have died in transit since 1997 according to the government's own statistics.

**The "REAL ID Act" gives unprecedented power to bounty hunters, sending a chill throughout the entire Latino community.** The "REAL ID Act" would allow bonding agents and bounty hunters to apprehend, detain, and turn in immigrants if they believe the immigrant is a flight risk. It also provides bonding agents with free access to federal, state, and local

databases with no privacy protections. This would take immigration enforcement out of the hands of the Department of Homeland Security and immigration judges and allow bounty hunters to make critical decisions.

**The asylum-related provisions of the “REAL ID Act” will prohibit many individuals fleeing persecution from obtaining safe haven in the U.S.** This section of the bill is not about preventing terrorists from getting asylum; terrorists are already barred from receiving asylum. These provisions do nothing to make us safer and do great damage to our nation’s proud heritage as a place of refuge for those fleeing persecution.

**The “REAL ID Act” violates fundamental American values and fairness.** The “REAL ID Act” would deny asylum to persons fleeing persecution in their home countries. It would allow the government to deport immigrants for exercising rights of free speech that are protected under the U.S. Constitution and impose "guilt by association," rendering people deportable for wholly lawful and peaceful activity if such activity supports any group (or the member of any group) that has engaged in the use of weapons or has threatened to use weapons. The “REAL ID Act” also makes immigrants deportable based on the actions of their spouses and parents. And the “REAL ID Act” would explicitly suspend the "Great Writ" of habeas corpus for certain immigrants for the first time since the Civil War.

We know that our immigration system is broken and in desperate need of reform. The “REAL ID Act” is not a real solution. Comprehensive immigration reform is needed to address the root causes of undocumented immigration, to save lives along the border, and to provide U.S. employers with a legal workforce. In addition, the nation will be safer if we enforce our immigration laws fairly and provide all of our residents with due process of law. We strongly oppose and urge you to oppose the “REAL ID Act.”

Sincerely,

***North Carolina***

El Pueblo, Inc

***Kansas***

El Centro, Inc.

***Nebraska***

NAF Multicultural Human Development Corporation  
Mexican American Commission

***Tennessee***

Conexión Américas  
Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition

***District of Columbia***

Carlos Rosario International Career Center, Inc.  
Latin American Youth Center  
Central American Resource Center (CARECEN)

Council of Latino Agencies

***Ohio***

Farm Labor Organizing Committee  
Organización Cívica y Cultural Hispana Americana

***Georgia***

Coordinating Council of Latino Community Leaders  
Latinos for Education and Justice Organization (LEJO)

***Florida***

Latino Leadership, Inc.  
Hispanic Coalition, Inc.  
Coalition of Florida Farmworker Organizations, Inc.  
Everglades Community Association  
Mexican American Council, Inc.

***Oregon***

The Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality  
Casa of Oregon

***Illinois***

Alivio Medical Center  
Illinois Migrant Council  
The Resurrection Project  
Latinos United  
Little Village Community Development Corporation

***California***

Chicano Federation of San Diego County, Inc.  
Darin M. Camarena Health Centers, Inc.  
Los Angeles Leadership Academy  
Campesinos Unidos, Inc.  
Montebello Housing Development Corporation  
MAAC Project  
Watts/Century Latino Organization  
Eastbay Spanish Speaking Citizens' Foundation  
Unity Council  
Community Child Care Council of Santa Clarita County  
Chicano Federation of San Diego County, Inc.  
Parent Institute for Quality Education  
Council for the Speaking Spanish-CA

***New York***

OLA Eastern Long Island  
East End Direct Action  
Rural Opportunities, Inc

Community Association of Progressive Dominicans  
Alianza Dominicana, Inc.  
Latin American Workers' Project

***Virginia***

Hispanic Committee of Virginia

***New Mexico***

Enlace Comunitario  
Hands Across Cultures, Corp

***Texas***

Tejano Center For Community Concerns, Inc.  
First Mexican Baptist Church  
Vecinos Unidos, Inc.  
Centro Salud Familiar La Fe, Inc.

***Washington***

El Centro de la Raza

***Arizona***

Valle del Sol, Inc.  
Chicanos Por La Causa, Inc.

***Nevada***

Nevada Hispanic Services, Inc.

***Maryland***

CASA of Maryland, Inc.

***Michigan***

Latino Family Services

***Colorado***

Colorado Rural Housing Development Corporation  
Latin American Research and Service Agency  
NEWSED Community Development Corporation  
Del Norte Neighborhood Development

***Pennsylvania***

Congreso de Latinos Unidos, Inc.  
Nueva Esperanza, Inc.

***South Carolina***

Acercamiento Hispano de Carolina del Sur  
Coalition for New South Carolinians

***Alabama***

Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama (HICA)

***Arkansas***

La Casa Health Network

***Kentucky***

Centro “La Esperanza”

***Wisconsin***

Centro Hispano

La Casa de Esperanza, Inc.