

May 6, 2013

Senator Patrick Leahy, Chair
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As faith leaders who care deeply about building a just immigration system, we write in strong support of your bill, the Uniting American Families Act (S. 296), and stand in strong support of its inclusion in the comprehensive immigration reform bill (S. 744) when it comes before the Judiciary Committee this month.

Our diverse faith traditions teach a common commitment to the welcome and care of our neighbors. Our faith communities, just as our nation as a whole, are strengthened by the inclusion of persons from a diversity of national backgrounds, experiences, and identities. Of the many great injustices in our nation's presently broken immigration system, family separation is one of the most egregious. Family is the bedrock of any society and is critical in the development of healthy individuals and strong communities.

Currently, however, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans and their families face discrimination in our immigration system, as citizens and permanent residents in same-sex relationships are unable to sponsor their spouses, permanent partners, and children for immigration to the United States. This adversely affects both the families in question and their communities. As a result of this unjust treatment, U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents in same-sex families are being forced to separate or move abroad, disrupting their careers, uprooting their children, and breaking ties with extended family, local communities and faith communities. We believe that our nation's citizens and permanent residents should not be forced to choose between their country and the people they love.

These families are our families and our brothers and sisters in faith. We have witnessed the injustice they face under our laws and we have stood beside them as they have been forced to make impossible choices between their family and their country. One example of such a family is the Reverend Sarah Lamming and the Reverend Diana Carroll. Sarah and Diana are Episcopal priests in Annapolis, MD. They have been together since 2005 and were married in Maryland in January of this year. Sarah and Diana serve their respective churches and are integral parts of the Annapolis community. When Sarah's visa expires next year, however, Diana will not be able to sponsor her for a green card. If they are forced to relocate abroad, two Maryland Episcopal churches will lose gifted and dynamic leaders who are loved by their communities. Our nation's commitment to fairness and equality for all people demands that we treat Sarah and Diana, and families like theirs across the country, with the same dignity as we treat other immigrant families.

We believe that including the families of same-sex spouses and permanent partners will strengthen the chances for success of the immigration reform package. With the recent dramatic increase in support by Senators for the legal recognition of same-sex relationships, and with strong national grassroots support for such recognition (including 64% of Latino voters and an increasingly large number of people of faith,) we believe inclusion of UAFA will only strengthen public support for comprehensive immigration reform. Our faith communities stand committed to offering broad-based grassroots support for a UAFA amendment to the bill.

More than 2,500 faith leaders from all fifty states, including 57 bishops of the Episcopal, Methodist, and Lutheran churches are part of the Faith Coalition for the Uniting American Families Act. The Episcopal Church chairs this strong and continually growing alliance. A list of coalition members who have signed a letter to Congress urging inclusion of UAFA in comprehensive immigration reform is attached.

We thank you for your unwavering leadership on this issue as we strive toward dignity and equal treatment for all families in our nation's immigration system. No reform of that system can truly be called comprehensive unless it includes all immigrant families, including the families of same-sex spouses and partners. We are committed to working with you and other members of the Senate, and with our broad networks, to support this long overdue and much-needed reform of our immigration laws.

Sincerely,

Rev. Geoffrey A. Black
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ

Bishop Minerva Carcaño
United Methodist Church
Los Angeles Area

Shan Cretin
General Secretary
The American Friends Service Committee

Richard Foltin
Director of National and Legislative Affairs
American Jewish Committee

Bishop H. Julian Gordy
Southeastern Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Richard H. Graham
Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

Bishop Kevin Kanouse
Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Mission Area
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Gerald L. Mansholt
Central States Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. John L. McCullough
President and CEO
Church World Service

Rev. Peter Morales
President
Unitarian Universalist Association

The Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan
President
Disciples Justice Action Network (DJAN)

Bishop Stephen S. Talmage
Grand Canyon Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Steven L. Ullestad
Northeastern Iowa Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Alan van Capelle
Chief Executive Officer
Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice

Cc: Members, Senate Judiciary