

Statement of the US Catholic Bishops in Border States and Beyond

On

Recommended Reforms to Immigration Enforcement in the United States

February 24, 2026

We speak out as pastors in border states and beyond concerned about the impact of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) recent and ongoing immigration enforcement activities against individuals and families who are without legal status in our country.

While we acknowledge the right and duty of a sovereign nation to enforce its laws, we also believe that those laws should be upheld in a manner that protects the God-given human dignity and rights of the human person.

As Congress and the administration consider options to reform how immigration enforcement is conducted in our nation, we offer the following policy recommendations which, we believe, will help protect the human rights of immigrants and their families:

The right to apply for asylum at the border should be honored. We are very concerned with bona fide asylum-seekers being denied the opportunity to apply for asylum at the US-Mexico border. The right to apply for asylum is part of US and international law. Denying them this right leaves them in dangerous conditions and situations, subject to abuse by criminal organizations. Access to asylum at the border should be fully restored. We also oppose the arrest and detention of law-abiding refugees who have been lawfully admitted to the US, as has been proposed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Sensitive locations should be protected. We strongly urge you to restore "sensitive locations"—places of worship, schools, and health-care facilities—as protected from immigration enforcement activities. These locations must be protected to ensure that immigrants and their families are able to access, without fear, important services necessary for their well-being and survival. In fact, access to these services — religious practice, education, and health-care — is protected under US law.

From our perspective as pastors, we have found that members of our flock have decided not to attend Mass or access the sacraments of the Church because of the fear of immigration enforcement. We consider this an issue of religious freedom—a right enshrined in both the US Constitution and international covenants. Moreover, children should be able to attend school without fear and those in need of urgent medical care should be able to seek treatment with confidence. The reinstatement of these sensitive locations would preserve basic access to these necessary and life-affirming services.

Immigration enforcement should not focus on those who are contributing to the nation. We reaffirm the position of the US Catholic bishops that those immigrants and their families who have built equities in our country and are otherwise law-abiding—the vast majority of the undocumented—should be given an opportunity to come out of the shadows and earn their citizenship over time, becoming full legal members of and contributors to their communities and the nation. As such, we believe that immigrants and their families who are contributing to the common good should not be targeted for removal.

Immigrant families should be kept together. We also strongly urge you to ensure that the separation of families, which can have detrimental effects on the family unit, is minimized by allowing them, to the greatest extent possible, to remain together in the US. Deporting “mixed-status” families as a group—families with at least one family member who is a citizen—can significantly harm family members who have been born and raised in our country, especially US-citizen children. Studies have shown, as well, that separating US-citizen children from their parent(s) can cause children unnecessary emotional harm and inhibit their development.

Due process should be restored in the immigration system. We strongly believe that everyone should receive the due process afforded by our justice system, including a right to appear in court, ideally with the benefit of legal representation. The right to due process is enshrined in our Constitution. We believe that certain policies currently being pursued by immigration enforcement undermine this right—the use of expedited removal, warrantless arrests, administrative warrants, courtroom arrests, and racial profiling, among other policies—and should be prohibited.

The use of tactics to intimidate and create fear in the community should be halted. The use of certain tactics by immigration enforcement officials are designed to intimidate immigrants and create fear in the community. The use of masks, random stops without probable cause, roving patrols, and physical abuse of immigrants and others has been well documented. Such tactics can intimidate immigrants, even those with a legal basis to remain in the US, and prevent them from asserting their rights. We urge that the use of these tactics be stopped.

Detention standards should be enforced and vulnerable groups should not be detained. The expansion of detention facilities across the nation, such as the so-called *Alligator Alcatraz* in Florida, is of grave concern to us, as many of these facilities are being built in remote locations, incarcerating immigrants in substandard conditions and in some cases without access to appropriate medical care and religious services. We echo the recent statement from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) that the administration’s plan to convert warehouses into mass detention centers is “deeply troubling.” In our view, the use of detention should be minimized, not expanded, and alternatives to detention be pursued.

We also urge our immigration enforcement officials not to detain vulnerable persons and groups, including families and children, pregnant women, and the disabled. We also strongly assert that detainees have access to religious and pastoral care, including Mass and the sacraments of the Catholic Church.

Congress and the administration should fund reintegration programs for deportees. Finally, we urge the US government to help mitigate the root causes of irregular migration—the lack of economic development, climate degradation, and conflict and insecurity in sending nations—as well as to invest in reintegration programs to ensure that immigrants can safely and humanely reintegrate into their original homes and support themselves and their families in dignity. Immigrants should not be deported to third countries.

As the US Catholic bishops and many across the country have advocated for decades, Congress should repair the US immigration system by placing hard-working immigrants and their families on a path to citizenship and by improving access to the legal immigration system. As was stated in a *Special Message* in November of last year, the US bishops oppose “the indiscriminate mass deportation of people” and

believe it is detrimental to the human rights of our fellow human beings and not in the best interest of the nation.

As Congress and the administration deliberate changes to how immigration enforcement is conducted across the nation, we urge them to consider these recommendations. As always, we stand ready to work with them to create an immigration system which ensures public safety, protects human rights, encourages economic growth and justice, and upholds our heritage as a nation of immigrants.

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