



Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

In the National Capital Region

UUSJ Advocacy Corps Frequently Asked Questions

Thank you for your interest in the new UUSJ Advocacy Corps!

Below are Frequently Asked Questions based on two information sessions held in January 2017. Due to a high interest in citizen activism and the monthly UUSJ Advocacy Corps, we have prepared this document and a short information video. You can request a link to the video by sending a message to info@uusj.org with “Advocacy Corps Video” in the subject line.

Forward!
Lavona Grow
UUSJ Advocacy Oversight Committee, Chair

Purpose Statement: UUSJ Advocacy Corps members shall actively promote UU Principles, values, denominational positions — Statements of Conscience, resolutions, Actions of Immediate Witness — by serving as volunteer advocates on Capitol Hill monthly.

NOTE: the first Advocacy Corps visit will be February 14, 2017.

What is UUSJ?

UUSJ is a partnership of UU congregations, affiliated organizations and individual members in the national capital region with a mission to “Mobilize and amplify the voices of UUs...” UUSJ is a 501(c)3 organization. Learn more about UUSJ at www.uusj.org.

Why is UUSJ organizing an Advocacy Corps?

There is no other UU organization conducting direct advocacy at the federal level. We believe it is imperative to maintain a UU direct advocacy presence in the nation’s

capital. We believe strongly that UUs here in the Washington area have a responsibility to respond to this unmet need. Since its inception, UUSJ has educated about advocacy. Now UUSJ will do advocacy — that is, become advocates. The core purpose of this shift is to bring critical issues to the attention of federal policy-makers.

Why does UUSJ have an Advocacy Corps? Can we actually make a difference?

UUSJ has a programmatic focus on public policy advocacy to federal policymakers in Washington, DC. The Advocacy Corps takes the UU voice to offices on Capitol Hill on UUSJ priority issues — escalating income inequality, immigration, and environment and climate justice.

The need is urgent for a progressive religious voice to build relationships and talk with members of Congress and their staff from a perspective of faith and values. With our grounding in democracy, justice and inclusion, UUs can make a difference and fill a void through collective action with UUSJ.

What do Advocacy Corps members do?

Advocacy Corps members can be considered as volunteer ambassadors who are committed to UU values and justice. They encourage policymakers towards positive changes on important issues for the greater good.

Advocacy Corps members

- Receive an orientation from UUSJ about the Advocacy Corps.
- Participate in the monthly Second Tuesday advocacy day to lobby members of Congress on UU issues and UUSJ priorities.
- Deliver information to members of Congress on key issues and UU social action positions.
- Promote the Advocacy Corps in their congregations.
- Represent UUism and UUSJ as they build relationships with Capitol Hill offices.

When does the Advocacy Corps lobby?

The second Tuesday of every month is the regular lobby day for the Advocacy Corps. Members gather at 9:30am in a designated location on the Senate or House side for a short issue briefing and Q&A session about the focus issue. They disperse to meeting assignments as a group or in small teams and complete their visits by 12:30pm.

What issues does the Advocacy Corps discuss? Who decides on the issues?

The focus is primarily on UUSJ priority areas - immigration, escalating income inequality, environment and climate justice - guided by our denomination's Seven

Principles and values, Statements of Conscience, General Assembly resolutions, and Actions of Immediate Witness. We also consider UUA and UUSC issues.

The UUSJ Advocacy Oversight Committee determines the monthly lobby day issues in consultation with UUSJ issue teams and partners.

I'm interested in joining the UUSJ Advocacy Corps. Do I have to be an issue expert or have experience in lobbying?

Generalists are welcome! UUSJ provides an orientation and lobby training to Advocacy Corps members.

On each Second Tuesday lobby day, UUSJ provides the Advocacy Corps with background and factual information, talking points and a briefing on the selected issue.

Advocacy Corps volunteers speak from the heart, guided by the moral compass of our UU values and principles. They convey the importance of issues by sharing their own and others' personal stories of the impact in our communities and on our planet.

What qualifications, skills and abilities do I need?

You should

- be a member of UUSJ, as the Advocacy Corps speaks on behalf of UUSJ and UU principles and values.
- be able to deliver information clearly and concisely.
- have a positive attitude and approach, and treat ALL staff and members of Congress with respect and in a manner that fosters a long-term working relationship between UUSJ and the Congressional office.

How and when does the Advocacy Corps get notified about the "Second Tuesday" lobby visits? ?

The Advocacy Corps members will receive an email on the Friday or Saturday (about four days) before the Second Tuesday Advocacy Corps lobby day, with information on the location (Senate or House) for our Hill visits and general issue we will be advocating. The day before, you will receive details on the focus issue if available.

UUSJ also equips the Advocacy Corps with UUSJ badges; notecards for handwritten messages, if necessary; business cards; a "talking points" / briefing fact sheet and material to be left behind at the end of each meeting (see examples at the end of this document).

Are there ways to support the Advocacy Corps without directly lobbying?

The Advocacy Corps is one way to engage in UUSJ's advocacy program.

Others include:

- Respond to UUSJ Action Alerts and send messages to members of Congress, Executive Branch, and policy makers. Sign up [here?](#)
- Organize "Write Here, Write Now" letter-writing campaigns in your congregation. Let us know when you have letters and we will hand-deliver them for you! Available on the UUSJ website [link here](#).
- Spread the news! Tell your friends about the UUSJ Advocacy Corps and encourage them to join.
- Research issues and/or write background papers for Advocacy Corps visits.
- Join a UUSJ issue group. Sign up here www.uusj.org
- Share your issue and lobbying expertise with UUSJ! If you're limited by your job or situation and unable to lobby, but have expertise in UUSJ issue areas and/or in lobbying, you can help us by sharing advice and information.
- Volunteer to help during the April 3-5, 2017 Reversing Inequality Conference in Washington, DC. On day three we need volunteers to help conference participants get to Capitol Hill offices.

For more information:

Visit our website - www.uusj.org

Give us a call - 202-600-9132

Or send us an email - info@uusj.org - subject line Advocacy Corps

Other materials:

Example of talking points/briefing paper

Example of "leave behind" letter for Congressional Offices



Unitarian Universalists
for Social Justice
In the National Capital Region

UUSJ CAPITOL HILL ADVOCACY CORPS
November 9, 15 and 21, 2016
Immigration Detention Bed Quota

FOCUS: Virginia and Maryland Senators/Reps; Rep. Ted Deutch (FL-21)

MEETINGS:

Nov. 9, 10:30am

Rep. Connelly: 2238 Rayburn House Office Building
Molly Claire Cole, Foreign Affairs Legislative Assistant (started 2 weeks ago)

Nov. 15, 2:00pm

Rep. Ted Deutch (FL-21): 2447 Rayburn House Office Building
Joshua Lipman, Senior Legislative Assistant/Counsel
The purpose of this meeting is to introduce UUSJ; gather information; offer appreciation for his efforts to end the bed quota.

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Sen. Warner: 475 Russell Senate Office Building

Nov. 21?

Sen. Cardin: 509 Hart Senate Office Building

Nov. 21?

Rep. Delaney: 1632 Longworth House Office

Pending election results

Rep. Comstock: 226 Cannon House Office Building

WHO WE ARE: When you meet with the staff person explain who we are, “Hello, this is XXX and my name is XXX. We’re here to speak with you on behalf of Unitarian Universalists who are members of the Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice in the National Capital Region.”

There are over 6500 UU members in the National Capital Region. Are you familiar with the Unitarian Universalist denomination? [If not leave some information and give a 1-2

sentence explanation such as:] UUs embrace a diversity of religious beliefs. We put our faith into action through social and environmental justice work in our communities and the wider world. [quoted from the UUA website]

I. MESSAGE

The United States has the largest immigrant detention infrastructure in the world with over 400,000 individuals passing through detention each year. The expansion of the system is in part due to an arbitrary quota from Congress that requires the incarceration of 34,000 immigrants in detention at any given time. This policy, known as the detention bed quota, is unprecedented; no other law enforcement agency operates on a quota system.

Our Unitarian Universalist (UU) Principles and Sources compel us to affirm that all immigrants, regardless of legal status, should be treated justly and humanely. Therefore at a minimum, a moral immigration policy would include the elements contained in a Statement of Conscience (SOC) passed at our General Assembly in June 2013.

We urge you to support the removal of the detention bed quota from appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security.

II. BACKGROUND

The Unitarian Universalist Association's (UUA) Statement of Conscience (SOC) was voted on at the 2013 General Assembly — Immigration as a Moral Issue.

Increased enforcement of immigration laws and the proliferation of for-profit detention centers have led to egregious human rights violations with little accountability or transparency. For example, immigrants in the U.S. detention system are not afforded the same due process rights as U.S. citizens, leading to unnecessarily lengthy detentions, and thus greater profits for the prison industry. These centers are poorly regulated and often overcrowded. Essential needs, including medical attention, are often denied, while more cost effective and humane measures are ignored. Immigration enforcement consumes increasingly more of the federal government's resources.

Many undocumented immigrants and their families live in constant fear of deportation. This fear affects their use of educational opportunities and health care services, and their willingness to interact with local police officers. Enlisting local law enforcement agencies in immigration enforcement violates accepted practices of community policing and erodes trust between police and the communities they serve, sometimes resulting in racial profiling of those who appear to be foreign. Deportation results in destroyed dreams and broken families—partners separated and children taken away from their caregivers or forced to return to a place they do not know. The perceived and constructed threat of those who are different has led some individuals and nations to

meet immigrants with fear. Fear has become a social and political force that incorrectly labels people as “illegals,” “criminals,” and “terrorists.”

Given the consequences of immoral and unjust immigration policies, we pledge to ground our missions and ministries in UU Principles and Sources as we undertake individual, congregational, and denominational actions.

Nations have assumed the right and obligation to protect the security and well-being of their citizens by enacting and enforcing immigration laws. Our challenge as religious people is to distinguish the moral from the immoral, supporting the former and opposing the latter.

III. TALKING POINTS

- Since 2009, congressional appropriations laws have included language on immigration detention beds that is known as the detention bed quota. No other law enforcement agency is subject to a real or perceived quota for its detainees.
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the interior enforcement agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), detains an average of 34,000 men, women and children daily—nearly half a million people annually—in a network of more than 250 county jails, privately-run contracted facilities, and federal facilities.
- Immigration detention, the fastest-growing component of mass incarceration, costs taxpayers \$2 billion dollars a year and causes incalculable suffering to hundreds of thousands of immigrant families and communities.
- Bed quotas are particularly costly; the sponsors of the **Protecting Taxpayers and Communities from Local Detention Quotas Act** (HR 2808), which would bar ICE from using guaranteed minimums in federal immigration contracts, estimate that taxpayers could save \$15 billion over the next decade by ending the detention bed quota.
- Immigration detention quotas give financial support to the private prison industry and to county budgets.
- Local quotas, referred to as guaranteed minimums in detention facility contracts, act as another tool to ensure a profit-stream and can be found in at least half of ICE’s field offices. These contractual provisions promise that ICE will pay for a certain number of detention beds regardless of how many people are detained to fill these beds. And as a perverse incentive, ICE agents are then encouraged to increase enforcement in order to maximize taxpayer dollars that are being spent to detain people.

- The public increasingly believes that using immigrants and refugees to improve prison contractors' portfolios is misguided and wrong; in just the last year, the University of California and Columbia University agreed to divest from private prison contractors, and the town of Gary, Indiana, has stopped the construction of a new GEO-run detention facility.
- ICE must stop affirming immigration detention as a market-based activity and remove guaranteed minimums from detention center contracts.
- Congress should bar the use of local lockup quotas and eliminate from the annual federal appropriations bill the "detention bed quota" that incentivizes the mass incarceration of immigrants.
- Lockup quotas – and government-sanctioned profiteering off immigration detention – are moral and financial quicksand.

IV. STATUS

President Obama FY 2017 budget request reduces the bed quota to 30,913 detention beds: 29,953 adult beds at an average rate of \$126.46 per day and 960 family beds at an average rate of \$161.36 per day.

The DHS budget justification states that "These detention bed levels ensure the most cost-effective use of Federal dollars by focusing the more costly detention capabilities on priority aliens and those who are subject to mandatory detention by law (mandatory aliens). This strategy allows ICE to place low-risk, non-mandatory aliens in [Alternative to Detention] ATD programs, such as electronic monitoring and intensive supervision."

HR 2808 was introduced in June 2015 and referred to the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security. No additional actions have been taken.



**Unitarian Universalists
for Social Justice**
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November 9, 2016

The Honorable Gerald Connolly
United States House of Representatives
2238 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Connolly:

On behalf of more than 6,500 Unitarian Universalists in 24 congregations in the National Capital Region and members of the Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ), we ask you to actively work towards removing the immigration detention bed quota from the Department of Homeland Security's FY 2017 appropriations bill and system.

Congress has mandated since 2009 that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) hold at least 34,000 immigrants in detention each day. A detention center in Farmville, VA, run by Immigration Centers of America, is allotted 500 beds per day.

The national ICE detention quota is contained in appropriations legislation for 2017 and should be removed as soon as possible. Here are facts drawn from the National Immigrant Justice Center:

- **The United States has the largest immigrant detention infrastructure in the world and today it locks up more immigrants than ever before.**
- **The expansion of the system is in part due to the immigration detention bed quota, a law passed by Congress whereby 34,000 immigrants are held in ICE detention at any given time.**
- **This is unprecedented; no other law enforcement agency operates on a quota system.**
- **As politicians discuss immigration reform, any meaningful reforms to the immigration system will be impossible with the quota in place.**

Immigration detention has been used by the United States in various forms throughout the country's history. It was temporarily suspended, with the closing of Ellis Island in 1954, and seemed to be extinct. With the influx of Haitian and Cuban refugees in the 1980s its use was reinstated, and since that time the system has steadily expanded through legislation and policy initiatives. Through the Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA), Congress increased the number of aliens subject to mandatory detention, resulting in the expansion of the number of detention beds available to meet the mandate. During the 108th Congress P.L. 108-458, the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, directed the Secretary of Homeland

Security to increase the number of detention beds by 8,000 annually starting in FY2006 through FY2010. Eventually, the House Appropriations Committee began incorporating a mandate into the annual appropriations bill. The FY2017 bill requires DHS to maintain 34,000 beds.

The human cost of this system is terrible:

- **There have been 142 deaths in detention since 2003**
- **The families and communities of nearly half a million people are torn apart every year.**

The economic cost is:

- **\$2.2 billion each year**
- **Over \$6 million each day**
- **\$159 per detention bed each day**

There are many good alternatives to detaining non-criminal undocumented immigrants, including home detention or simply relying on them to appear at court on the designated date of hearing. These immigrants have, for the most part, committed civil violations unrelated to the violent criminal acts that mandate detention in a locked facility. Overall, the funds for this program could be better directed.

In 2013, our Unitarian Universalist General Assembly passed a Statement of Conscience on "Immigration as a Moral Issue." It states, "Our Unitarian Universalist (UU) Principles and Sources compel us to affirm that all immigrants, regardless of legal status, should be treated justly and humanely." We strongly support a just and equitable reform of our nation's immigration laws. While that process is pending, we ask you to take action that can immediately alleviate the suffering of thousands of immigrants.

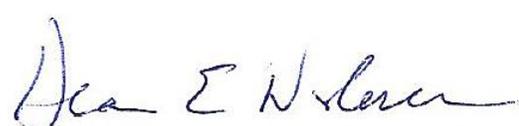
If you have any questions, contact us through our Immigration Steering Committee chair, Dean Wanderer, at deanwanderer@verizon.net, or (571) 214-2710.

ENDING THE 34,000 BED QUOTA IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD HUMANIZING OUR IMMIGRATION SYSTEM.

Sincerely,



Pavel DeJesus
Executive Director



Dean E. Wanderer
Dean Wanderer, Chair
Immigration Steering Committee