



Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

June 14, 2017

The Honorable Ben Cardin
United States Senate
509 Senate Hart Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cardin:

On behalf of the Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ), we thank you for your advocacy for the rights of immigrants in Maryland and throughout the nation. Today we urge you to actively support two Senate bills (S.303 and S.668) that we believe are helpful to our immigrant brothers and sisters, and to oppose three pieces of legislation that would, if enacted, harm these same people.

There are more than 6,500 Unitarian Universalists in 23 congregations in the National Capital Region and 4,444 in 24 congregations in Maryland. Unitarian Universalists are called to put our faith into action in our communities and the wider world. Regarding immigration, we are called by our first Principle, "The Inherent Worth and Dignity of Every Person."

In 2013 our Unitarian Universalist General Assembly passed a Statement of Conscience on "Immigration as a Moral Issue." It states: "Our Unitarian Universalist 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.

S.303 would clarify that immigration enforcement is solely a function of the Federal Government and would discontinue authorization of State and local law enforcement officers to investigate, apprehend, and detain aliens. Immigration advocates agree that programs referenced in this bill create a climate of fear and intimidation among immigrants and sharply decrease the willingness of undocumented immigrants to report crimes and otherwise support the criminal justice system.

S. 668 would nullify the effect of the January 25, 2017 Executive order regarding border security and immigration enforcement. This bill has 26 co-sponsors and we are pleased that you are among them.

Amidst so much negative input from the Trump Administration, we are glad to see that you and other Senators are pushing forward to support just and equitable immigration policies and programs.

On the negative side, three bills pending in the House of Representatives concern us greatly: H.R.2431 (the so-called Davis Act), H.R.2406 and H.R.2407. These bills would implement an immigration agenda that is singularly focused on punitive enforcement and on the mass detention and deportation of undocumented people, with no regard for the harm it would do to American communities. We and most other Americans want, and our nation needs, policies that strengthen our economy, our communities, and our nation as a whole—not punitive enforcement that frightens immigrant communities and compromises public safety.

The Davis Act would subject to arrest, criminal prosecution, and removal the mothers and fathers of the 4.5 million U.S. citizens in this country who have at least one undocumented parent, thus tearing apart families and achieving no legitimate law enforcement purpose. It would turn Dreamers, or people brought to the United States as children who lack immigration status, into criminals.

We believe that H.R. 2406 and H.R. 2407 are not viable ways to advance border security and internal immigration enforcement because they include no provisions to assist immigrant victims who have been targeted as the result of a hate crime, may feed into rhetoric that seeks to portray all immigrants as threats, and would prohibit the operation of the Office of Public Advocate within ICE. Please oppose these bills if/when they come over from the House.

One of the most ancient ethical injunctions on us as human beings is for humane treatment of strangers. U.S. immigration policy is a reflection of our worth as a nation. We currently fall far short of the standards set above.

The Senate bills referenced above do comport with these standards while the House bills violate them and are anathema to our principles as Unitarian Universalists. We ask you to continue to work to ensure our immigration laws are humane, just and fair.

Again, thank you for your great work on behalf of immigrants and please let us know how we can assist you. Please contact UUSJ's Immigration Task Force Chair Dean Wanderer for further information at 571-214-2710 or email deanwanderer@verizon.net.

Sincerely,

John Gubbings
Acting UUSJ Board Chair