

Statement Opposing Fines on Immigrants

The Unitarian-Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ) strongly protest the imposition by ICE of draconian fines on vulnerable immigrants who are in the process of seeking asylum. This latest step is a piece of the overall pattern of threatening, harassing and bullying undocumented immigrants which we have seen coming from many quarters of the federal agencies (other examples include significant broadening of the definition of “public charge” and narrowing the definition of eligibility for housing subsidies to deter use of much needed food, health and housing support.). We ask ICE to cease issuing such notices of intention to fine and to rescind those notices already issued, where the amounts of fines are so outrageous and transparently uncollectable that the threatening intent is transparent.

We ask Congressional oversight committees to focus on restricting this kind of harassment of asylum-seekers.

UUSJ promotes Unitarian Universalist values at the federal level in partnership with members nationwide. Our denomination has indicated in numerous public statements¹ support for a just and equitable immigration system, in line with our principles, in particular, respect for the inherent worth and dignity of every person and justice, equity and compassion in human relations.

UUSJ fully recognizes the role of tools such as fines per Section 274D of INA for willful refusal to act in line with court decisions. However, we also are fully aware that the US has a history of changing the definition of reasonable standards for asylum (in particular, in response to legitimate fears of having to return to situations of gang violence or domestic violence). We also have specific knowledge of cases where the immigrants did not receive notices that the government claims to have sent and of cases where despite repeated filings of change of address (acknowledged by a federal agency), such agencies use old addresses anyway, risking non-receipt. We strongly support inclusion of fleeing from violence as a reasonable cause for approving asylum. We are deeply troubled by what appears to be almost willful misdirecting of notices to immigrants. We believe that many of those in physical sanctuary today in the US are victims of violence in their home countries desperate to avoid deportation and anxious to find a suitable path to legal residence so they can again become contributing members of our communities and our economy. There is no reason other than a desire to show hostility towards immigrants in general to impose six-figure fines on desperate and vulnerable persons.

We are better than this. Migrants are our fellow human beings pursuing their rights under international law to leave places of violence in pursuit of safety for themselves and their families. Justice needs to reach across borders and offer fair consideration to such people.

¹ 2013 Statement of Conscience “Immigration as a Moral Issue”; Actions of Immediate Witness in 2015, 2018 and 2019 directly relevant to these issues. See UUA.org.

UUSJ depends on the generosity of congregational and individual members to fund its 501c3 work. Thank you!