

UUSJ Immigration Task Group Report to Board

October 3, 2020

Because the Immigration Task Group agreed to lead the advocacy actions for September, much time was devoted to:

- agreeing on the issues that were timely: DHS appropriations and COVID relief bill
- deciding how to approach Congress during this transition time (both pandemic and move to staff-led advocacy work) – emphasis on sending electronic version of WHWN, as well as action alerts, as appropriations issue needed both House and Senate action
- developing the content for the WHWN briefing and the action alerts
- Identifying the Senators where meetings should be requested (not always matched with constituent letters or electronic messages)
- Running a pilot meeting with a “friendly office” (Van Hollen) to determine agenda and gain fresh information on likely developments
- Working with Executive Director on requests and confirmation of meetings (spread over two weeks – coinciding with time of board meeting)

We also, working with the Executive Director, joined Detention Watch Network. DWN is mainly led by immigrants or families of immigrants, and is a member-run organization, much as UUSJ. Several of us were involved in virtual meetings for orientation of new members. DWN is also in the midst of scenario planning for strategic direction under two scenarios – Trump win or Biden win. Members were invited to fill out a survey and later, the ITG convener participated in a discussion of the results. DWN has leaders living all around the US, including several in the DC area which focus on advocacy with Congress, including the DHS appropriations issues (mainly reducing funding of ICE and CBP enforcement and detention work). We have been able to start cooperating and sharing information with DWN already.

Several developments occurred that required ITG attention. The 9th circuit court decided that this administration’s decision to terminate Temporary Protected Status for El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Sudan, Haiti and Nepal was legal, unfortunately. Partner agencies like CASA and TPS Alliance are rallying grassroots support while others are preparing legal appeals (rather request for re-consideration). UUSJ had already gone to the Hill in March in support of (Van Hollen’s) TPS bill in the Senate (House already agreed to legislation offering a pathway to legality). We continue to monitor and sign petitions as individuals.

Another development was ICE’s entry into church grounds in the DMV area to detain and deport an undocumented Burmese man, Binsar Siahaan. We are signing petitions as individuals and as UUSJ. Further, the story broke about ICE detention center for women in Irwin, GA allowing unneeded and unwanted surgery (hysterectomies and sterilization). We have joined interfaith protests via petitions. We share information on social media about these developments as well.

Finally, we continue to monitor the following: immigration agenda of the Biden campaign, where a new and controversial advisor, Cecilia Muñoz, joined (because she worked for Obama during periods of high deportation numbers), decision on FY21 refugee resettlement levels (DHS/STATE decision, likely to be zero to 18,000, way too low) and the latest in anti-immigrant rule changes, this time on biometrics, where public comment might be needed.