

REPORT TO UUSJ BOARD FROM IMMIGRATION ACTION TEAM — MARCH 20 2021

Since the December Board meeting, the Immigration Action Team (IAT) has focused on the significant steps that the Biden Administration has been undertaking to reverse the punitive and damaging anti-immigrant policies of the Trump Administration. We have tracked executive orders and proposed comprehensive reform legislation sent to Congress by the White House. We have participated in webinars and Hill virtual meetings organized by partners. We have monitored the re-introduction of many partial immigration bills by the sponsors in Congress — Dream and Promise Act, Farm workforce modernization and others aimed at ending detention and integrating immigrants. A flurry of tactical maneuvers — including trying to get the proposed pathways for undocumented immigrants — or at least part of them — approved through the reconciliation process has been particularly significant. One popular idea was to get essential workers who are undocumented immigrants (including DACA and TPS) to have pathways to legal status as part of the COVID bill which was going to be approved through reconciliation. That bill was indeed approved that way, but not with any immigrant legalization component. There is not likely to be another covid relief bill given the size of the one just passed. The reaction of our “friendly” staffer friends on the Hill is that the US Citizenship Act of 2021, President Biden’s proposed comprehensive Immigration reform bill, it is too progressive to be approved in the Senate. Hence everyone is exploring piecemeal approaches. Advocacy partners are also raising strongly concerns about the “criminalization” of immigrants, since if they cross paths with the US criminal justice system (often biased against persons of color), even for minor acts like DUIs or fake social security cards, they will be excluded from consideration of pathways to legal status and may be deported, regardless of their long years of residence, US citizen family members or being hard-working tax-paying residents.

Realizing that this is a complicated landscape for many to understand and follow, the IAT decided to prepare an informational webinar set for March 24 to offer an overview of US immigration law history (racist and nationalist frequently) and in more detail, a look at the last decade and the next four years. Then we will hold a town hall in April, inviting partner organizations as well as any interested UUs, to help us decide on the best focus for our planned June advocacy initiative. There are many options, and getting feedback from our “moral owners” on which should have priority in a “moving target” sort of environment is our goal.

UUSJ has signed onto several letters to the Administration and Congress as well as one amicus brief in the areas we have long pursued in our advocacy priorities — legal pathways, reduced budgets for immigration enforcement agencies, treatment of those who have been in sanctuary, and alternatives to detention. We also issued an action alert asking UUs to support the Biden US Citizenship Act — even if getting it through the Senate would be challenging at best.