

## **Immigration Action Team (IAT) Report for the December Board Meeting**

During the Fall, it seemed that Congress might use the budget reconciliation process to provide pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who are recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), farm workers, and essential workers. So, the IAT concentrated on communicating with members of Congress from both parties. The IAT modified its July/August Action Alert to specifically urge members of Congress to support pathways to citizenship in the budget reconciliation bill. During October, November and early December, the IAT met with staff members from the offices of Congressman Cuellar (D-TX 28) and Senators Carper (D-DE), Hassan (D-NH), Kaine (D-VA), Cortez Masto (D-NV), Collins (R-ME), Murkowski (R-AK), Cassidy (R-LA) and Toomey (R-PA). The IAT was unsuccessful in getting meetings with Manchin (D-WV) and Sinema (D-AZ) and it still trying to get a meeting with Senator Portman (R-OH). One innovation: the meetings with staff members from Senators Murkowski's and Cassidy's offices, were joint meetings with the Democracy Action Team.

Prior to all of these meetings, we reached out to UUs in the home states of the members of Congress. In many instances there were only a few UUs on the UUSJ mailing list, so the IAT directly contacted UU congregations in each state. In all of these meetings we had from three to eight constituents in the meeting with the staff member. They not only brought a local perspective to the meetings but also provided new ideas and new information that was useful in advocating for pathways to citizenship.

The staff members in these meetings encouraged us to meet with additional members of Congress and to emphasize the economic importance of immigration in addition to the moral basis for pathways to citizenship.

In addition, IAT members continued to meet with key immigrant advocacy and faith group allies, to listen and to expand our partnerships, particularly with groups led by immigrants. We met with such groups as the CASA Allies network and the Virginia Coalition on Immigrant Rights. We also signed on to numerous group letters advocating for immigrant rights from such ally groups as Detention Watch Network, UndocuBlack Network, Church World Services, and the Interfaith Immigration Coalition. We also participated in the annual Virginia Immigrant Advocates Summit and in a series of Congressional visits and demonstrations in Washington, DC, as part of the #Welcome with Dignity Week of Action and similar events.

Looking to the future, the IAT plans will depend on what happens in Congress. The Build Back Better Bill includes only a temporary legal status for undocumented immigrants, not pathways to citizenship. If it passes, it would be an improvement, but we would plan to continue working for pathways to citizenship and comprehensive immigration reform. If it does not pass, this would be an indication that a different approach is required, and we would need to consult with other immigrant rights organizations to determine a path forward.

Going forward, the IAT feels that UUSJ needs to find a more systematic way to engage UUs from around the country in our advocacy work. The action teams need to work together in scheduling meetings with staffers and in finding local UUs to participate in meeting. It would also be good to develop a database of congregational contacts.