

Statement of Most Reverend John C. Wester
Bishop of Salt Lake City, Utah

Chairman, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops* Committee on Migration

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On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I join with the Catholic bishops of Arizona in strongly opposing the enactment and implementation of Arizona SB 1070. This new law, although limited to the State of Arizona, could have impact throughout the nation, in terms of how members of our immigrant communities are both perceived and treated.

SB 1070 gives law enforcement officials powers to detain and arrest individuals based on a very low legal standard, possibly leading to the profiling of individuals based upon their appearance, manner of speaking, or ethnicity. It could lead to the wrongful questioning and arrest of U.S. citizens and permanent residents as well as the division of families- parents from children and husbands from wives. It certainly would lead to the rise in fear and distrust in immigrant communities, undermining the relationships between their members and law enforcement officials.

SB 1070 is symptomatic of the absence of federal leadership on the issue of immigration. For years now, the U.S. Catholic bishops have called upon Congress and two Administrations to enact meaningful and just comprehensive immigration reform.

While many of our federal elected officials have made good faith efforts to pass reform, too many still view the issue through a political lens, using it to gain political or partisan advantage. This gamesmanship must stop.

Our national leaders must educate the American public on the need for reform and show courage in making it happen. Until immigration reform is passed, other States will attempt to create and enforce immigration law, with harsh and ineffective consequences.

The U.S. Catholic bishops stand in solidarity with the bishops of Arizona in opposing this draconian law. We call upon the Administration to review its impact on civil rights and liberties. We renew our call for the Administration and Congress to work in a bipartisan manner to enact comprehensive immigration reform as soon as possible.

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