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May 9, 2013

The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley, Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Leahy and Ranking Member Grassley:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition of more than 210 national advocacy organizations, we write to express our strong support for your Committee's upcoming effort to move forward with a bipartisan overhaul of our nation's immigration policies. We look forward to working with you in the coming weeks to ensure that S. 744, the "Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act" serves the interests of all Americans, and upholds the principles of civil and human rights that lie at the core of our national system.

Immigration is one of our most highly charged yet extremely complicated areas of the law, and any effort to undertake a comprehensive overhaul is a truly monumental task. We sincerely appreciate the efforts of the "Gang of Eight" – including, on your Committee, Sens. Charles Schumer (D-NY), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Dick Durbin (D-IL), and Jeff Flake (R-AZ) – to produce a thoughtful, comprehensive response to the many problems that have long plagued our nation's immigration system. While any bipartisan effort of this magnitude involves numerous compromises – resulting in some provisions that we enthusiastically support, and others that we find highly troubling – we are very thankful for the constructive tone that the Gang of Eight and many other Senators have taken with respect to the issues addressed in S. 744. During the upcoming markup, we hope to see the same collaborative spirit.

As the Committee turns to individual titles of the bill, we look forward to providing analyses of specific amendments and other feedback that we hope will be useful in the deliberative process. The ultimate goal of The Leadership Conference and the communities we represent is an immigration bill that includes the following key features:

- **A Path to Citizenship:** Hard-working immigrants who are contributing to this country must be encouraged to come out of the shadows and regularize their status. Forcing millions of workers to hide in an underground economy has hurt the health, safety, and welfare of all Americans. Our goal should be to integrate as many unauthorized immigrants into the United States as possible, once they meet reasonable requirements like background checks and payment of back taxes.



- **Firm and Fair Enforcement:** It is clear that our nation's immigration enforcement policies are in need of significant improvement. At the same time, these policies must be consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect and dignity. Any proposal that would criminalize immigrants, encourage state or local police to enforce immigration laws, permit the use of racial profiling, or penalize anyone for giving humanitarian assistance will not deter unauthorized immigration. Instead, it will only drive immigrants further underground, defeating the ultimate purpose of reform.
- **Protection of Civil and Human Rights:** Since 1996, including after 9/11, our immigration policies have drastically weakened the rights of immigrants. Many immigrants – including long-term legal residents – are torn away from their families under extremely harsh mandatory detention and deportation policies, or rushed through expedited proceedings that result in widespread mistakes and raise significant human rights concerns. In addition, the use of private, for-profit detention corporations has boomed in recent years. Immigration reform should minimize the use of detention, and provide access to fair, humane, and common-sense enforcement proceedings.
- **Family Reunification and Legal Immigration:** Under our current family-based immigration system, it can often take years – or even more than a decade – for close relatives of U.S. citizens or permanent residents to obtain immigrant visas. This only encourages people to overstay temporary visas or find some other way to enter the country. Reform legislation should reunite families, eliminate unconscionable family-based backlogs, eradicate discrimination against LGBT people, and ensure adequate numbers of visas in all categories. It should also continue to advance the international diversity that has made our nation so unique, either by preserving the diversity visa program or providing an adequate replacement.
- **Future Flow of Workers into the U.S.:** Any immigration proposal designed to meet the needs of employers for new labor must fully protect the rights of both new immigrant workers as well as those already here. Any proposal that forces established workers to leave the U.S. after a short period of time, with no path to citizenship, will make the workers vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Reform must also protect wages and promote economic advancement for native-born workers, including low-income African-American workers whose high rate of unemployment is often exploited by restrictionist groups.

Thank you very much for your leadership. We look forward to working with you in the coming weeks. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Rob Randhava, Senior Counsel, at (202) 466-6058 or randhava@civilrights.org.

Sincerely,

Wade Henderson
President & CEO

Nancy Zirkin
Executive Vice President