



Committee on Migration

c/o Migration and Refugee Services

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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TESTIMONY ON UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT YOUTH

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SUBMITTED TO

The House Judiciary Committee

Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security

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I am José H. Gomez, Archbishop of Los Angeles and Chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB or the Conference) Committee on Migration. I submit this testimony to you on behalf of the USCCB Committee on Migration.

The purpose of today's hearing is to examine the need to address the immigration status of persons in the United States today illegally who were brought here as children. I commend Subcommittee Chairman Trey Gowdy (R-SC), ranking member Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), and members of the subcommittee for addressing this issue. This population, most of whom came to the United States with their parents and not on their own volition, is particularly vulnerable, in great need of immigration relief, and is deserving of a chance to pursue the American dream.

As the subcommittee considers the issue of how to resolve the immigration status of persons brought to the United States while they were children, I ask that you provide the most generous relief possible for them, including a path to citizenship within a reasonable time period. I also stress the importance of providing that relief as part of broader comprehensive immigration reform that addresses the status of the rest of the 11 million undocumented persons residing in the United States, including – but not limited to – the parents of these children, many of whom are still providing care for their children.

The U.S. Catholic bishops supported and continues to support S. 744, the Border Security, Economic Competitiveness, and Immigration Innovation Act of 2013, which includes within it the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. The DREAM Act

provisions in that measure would afford impacted immigrant youth an opportunity to apply for naturalization within five years. Although some on this panel may disagree with some of the aspects of S. 744, the U.S. bishops strongly feel that both chambers should agree on this specific issue, which enjoys broad bipartisan support in Congress.

Under S. 744, an expedited path to citizenship would be available after five years to those who entered the United States before the age of 16, graduated from high school (or received a GED) in the U.S., and attended at least 2 years of college or 4 years in the military. We believe this formula is fair and ensures that these youth become part of our society as soon as possible, so they can begin contributing fully to our nation.

Our nation continues to grapple with the all-too-often polarizing issue of unauthorized immigration. In the face of the many challenges unauthorized immigration creates for our nation, our elected officials have not yet reached a humane compromise, one which not only protects the integrity of our nation's borders and security but also provides a viable solution for the millions of men, women, and children who remain in the shadows.

By holding this hearing, the Chairman and the Subcommittee understand that these youth are deserving of a chance to become Americans. They want to work hard and pay their way through college or serve in our military and defend American ideals. Giving them a chance for citizenship would reward their hard work, good moral character, education, and service to this country – all American ideals which these youth embody.

The United States is a great country because it is a land of opportunity, family values, and compassion. Throughout our history, we have given newcomers the opportunity to work hard and be successful, to our country's substantial benefit. We have also placed a high premium on the integrity of the family unit. And, we have refused to punish the innocent among us.

The U.S. Catholic bishops ask this committee and the House of Representatives to include the immigrant youth provisions of S. 744 in a comprehensive immigration reform bill that also provides a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented in our country, and to pass a comprehensive bill as soon as possible. We stand ready to support this committee and the House of Representatives in doing so.

Thank you.