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## Statement on Immigration Reform By the Catholic Bishops of New York State

Our country is in the midst of a pivotal national debate on immigration reform, the outcome of which will have a profound impact on the lives of millions of people, as well as serious long-term implications for the kind of society we want to be. It is important and necessary to address how better to secure our borders. However, we also must ask how to achieve reform that recognizes the reality of the presence among us of our immigrant sisters and brothers, acknowledges their contributions to our economy and society, and provides a pathway of hope for them and their families. Our challenge is to find a solution that is balanced, seeking the common good while respecting the rights and dignity of everyone.

New York State alone is home to more than 1.8 million non-citizens, hundreds of thousands of whom may be undocumented. They have a responsibility to contribute to the good of our society and live in harmony with their neighbors here. We see, in each of our dioceses, these men and women rear and support families through their dedication and hard work in our homes, landscaping our lawns and gardens, in restaurants, on farms, making our clothes, and as day laborers for a variety of community needs. On a national level, they pay property, sales, income and social security taxes upward of \$90 to \$140 billion a year. Many families come to our churches, attend our schools and use the services of our hospitals and Catholic Charities agencies. Many others are hidden, living in desperate fear of discovery and deportation. As Church, we must respond to the biblical imperative to “welcome the stranger” and affirm our historic commitment to helping immigrants and families.

In 2005, the U.S. Catholic Bishops announced a *Justice for Immigrants Campaign*. We reaffirm the campaign’s call for comprehensive immigration reform that provides for a pathway to permanent legal status for undocumented workers, expands opportunities to reunite families, establishes a rational and fair temporary worker program, and restores due process to immigrants. We strongly oppose both the criminalizing of immigrants for their undocumented status and the criminalizing of the agencies and religious congregations who help them. We believe our nation’s security concerns would be better met through an immigration system that allows immigrants the opportunity to enter in a timely, legal and systematic fashion.

In a few days at Easter, Christians around the world will share in the abundant joy and hope of the Risen Lord. This hope cannot simply remain in our hearts but must become the promise of a more just and charitable world. During this holy time of Easter hope, we urge the people of our state to contact our congressional leaders so that we can realize this promise by repairing our immigration system to create one which brings a sign of hope for immigrants and their families.

—Good Friday 2006