



Committee on Migration

c/o Migration and Refugee Services, USCCB

3211 Fourth Street NE • Washington DC 20017-1194

202-541-3227 • fax 202-722-8805 • email mrs@usccb.org • www.usccb.org/mrs

July 30, 2014

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the Committee on Migration of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I write to comment on S. 2648, the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2014, as introduced in the Senate on July 23, 2014. The measure would appropriate supplemental fiscal year 2014 funding to address the recent influx of unaccompanied children and families from Central America into the United States.

We support the appropriation of supplemental funds to address the increased number of unaccompanied children seeking to enter the United States. Some have called for including provisions in S. 2648 that would weaken or repeal key parts of the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, a law that includes protections for unaccompanied children in the United States or seeking entry to the United States who have been trafficked or who are in severe danger of being subjected to human trafficking. We commend the drafters of S. 2648 for not including such provisions in the measure. We would oppose the bill if such provisions were added to it by amendment on the Senate floor.

While we support the appropriation of supplemental funds to address the increased number of unaccompanied children from Central America arriving in the United States, we have grave reservations concerning the \$672 million that S. 2648 would appropriate to the Department of Homeland Security for the detention of immigrant families—mainly young mothers with young children. It is our view that families should be placed in less restrictive settings, ideally in alternative to detention (ATD) community-based settings with appropriate follow-up services. These ATD models have proven to be cost-effective and successful in ensuring that individuals appear at their immigration hearings. The needs of families with young children would be more appropriately met using this model.

We strongly support funding in S. 2648 that would give the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) the ability to care for unaccompanied children, especially to house them appropriately and to ensure that they receive case management services once they are released to family members. We also support the bill's provision directing HHS to restore refugee funding used for care of the children.

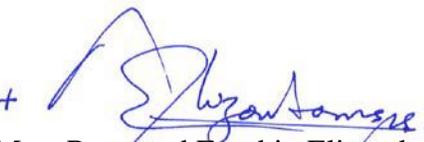
We also strongly support S. 2648's increase in funding for legal representation and legal orientation training for children, plus the increase in the number of immigration judges to help adjudicate their cases. Without these resources, it is unlikely that these vulnerable children, many of whom may be entitled to immigration relief, would be able to navigate our complex legal system.

We support the appropriation of \$300 million to the State Department to address root causes in the countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. These funds would help ensure that children and families who are unable to remain in the United States are repatriated humanely and that the root causes of violence and lack of opportunity are addressed, at least in the short term. They also would be used by the Inter-American Development Fund to invest in at-risk youth in these countries.

Finally, we believe it is essential to ensure that funds appropriated or used for HHS services in the supplemental appropriations bill are governed by abortion policies included on a bicameral and bipartisan basis each year in the Labor/HHS Appropriations Act. According to our reading of S. 2648, a straightforward technical fix needs to be made to it in order to ensure that these longstanding policies continue in the supplemental. We will work with the Senate to ensure that this fix is made. If it is not made we would have to oppose the measure and urge its defeat. Congress should also ensure that the legislation maintains longstanding policies on respect for religious freedom and the full participation of faith-based groups in assisting this needy population.

Senator, how our nation responds to this humanitarian challenge is a moral test of our national character. We ask that you support the appropriation of supplemental fiscal year 2014 funding to address the increased number of unaccompanied children fleeing violence in Central America, without amendments that would undermine current legal and humanitarian protections for them.

Sincerely,

+ 

Most Reverend Eusebio Elizondo
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration