

Statement of Bishop Anthony M. Pilla on Immigration Reform

March 27, 2006

The outcome of the current debate in our nation regarding immigration reform is one that will have far reaching effects for years to come. By all accounts, our current policy is broken and fundamentally flawed. It does not serve us well as a people. As Church our position on immigration policy flows from the Old and New Testament, the encyclicals of Popes and Catholic Social Teaching. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus calls upon us to “welcome the stranger,” for “what you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me.” (Mt. 25-35, 40).

Today, we have a wonderful opportunity to enact legislation that is humane and yet addresses legitimate economic, legal, social, and security issues. Nationally, our Bishops’ Conference supports S. 1033 the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act. For quite some time now, we have advocated:

- Policies that address the root causes of migration.
- Reform of our legal immigration system, including the adoption of an earned legalization program for undocumented workers and their families; a temporary worker program with appropriate protections for both U.S. and foreign workers; and reform of the family preference system, so families can be united in a timely fashion.
- Restoration of due process protections for immigrants to allow them to have “their day in court,” consistent with American values.

I strongly urge our U.S. Senators and our Congress to pass a bill that embodies these principles and respects the human dignity of our sisters and brothers who risk their lives to support their families. As the Church of Cleveland, we serve and welcome them. We have also benefited by the gifts they bring to our parish communities, region and nation. Among such gifts are: a strong work ethic, a commitment to family values and a profound spirituality.

In addition, I urge our elected officials to resist the punitive provisions contained in H.R. 4437, the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism and Illegal Immigration Act, which was recently passed by the House of Representatives. H.R. 4437 goes well beyond the issue of national security. In brief, it is overly broad and punitive, and would bring harm to immigrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees. One highly objectionable provision would potentially criminalize social service workers and church officials who serve new immigrants. This bill falls far short of our heritage as a welcoming, compassionate and open society.

Ultimately, immigration policy is a moral issue. I pray that our Congress and President create a new immigration system that reflects our deepest held values as a people and treats new immigrants in a fair and compassionate manner.