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March 9, 2006

Senator Mitch McConnell
316-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator McConnell:

We are writing because of our deep concern for those who will be affected by proposed changes in our immigration laws being debated now in Congress. Many of those affected currently live in Kentucky and are served by Catholic social service agencies and in parishes throughout the state. Our interest in the welfare of immigrants is rooted in Scripture, where, 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). We join others in concluding that our immigration system is in serious need of repair, which has created a climate fostering an unwelcome response to immigrants.

We believe a responsible, comprehensive reform of this system is possible and urge you to use the following principles in creating an immigration system that is just and builds up the common good.

It is our belief that any just immigration reform proposal should address the root causes of migration, such as global poverty, and should include the following elements: 1) a broad-based legalization of the undocumented; 2) a temporary worker program with appropriate protections for both U.S. and foreign workers; 3) changes to the family-based immigration system to reduce waiting times for family reunification; and 4) restoration of due process for immigrants.

We are aware that Senator Specter, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, has recently introduced legislation which will be considered in the committee. Although it is a marked improvement from H.R. 4437, the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Act of 2005, it requires improvements in many areas.

First, it does not go far enough to address the plight of the 11 million undocumented persons in the United States. While it does provide legal status and work authorization to this population, it does not provide a path to citizenship. Without a path to citizenship in the legislation, we fear that a

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permanent underclass of workers will be created in our country, which goes against traditional American values of opportunity, hard work, and compassion.

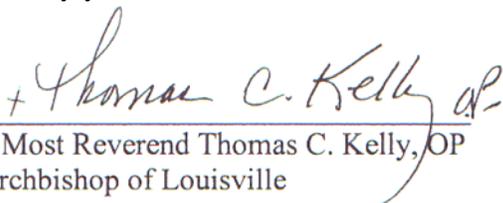
Second, it includes a temporary worker program which contains insufficient worker protections for both U.S. and foreign-born workers. There is no path to citizenship included in the program and no adequate labor-market test to ensure that U.S. workers are protected. We ask that you support adding these provisions to the program.

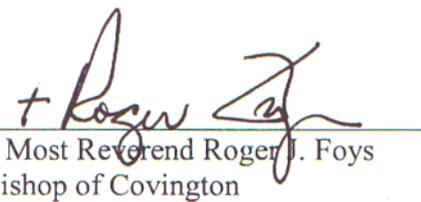
There are many provisions from H.R. 4437 included in the bill, including criminalization of undocumented presence; criminalization of passport misuse, including asylum-seekers who are unable to obtain valid documents from their governments; and the denial of permanent residency status to refugees who commit minor offenses. We urge you to oppose these overly harsh and punitive provisions.

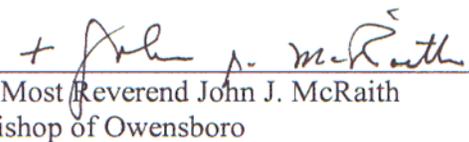
Prior to Senator Specter's introduction of legislation, we joined our fellow bishops in the other 49 states in pointing out that the provisions of S. 1033, the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act of 2005 best conformed to the principles we offer to repair this broken system. We urge you to support amendments to Senator Specter's bill that bring it closer to provisions found in S. 1033.

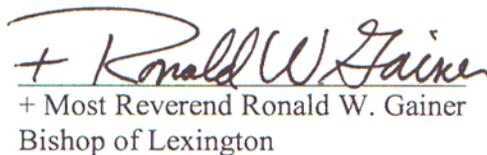
Finally, in a recent meeting at your field office in Bowling Green, Mr. Larry Cox indicated to Fr. Delahanty, Associate Director of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, that Mr. Joe Lanier, in your Washington office, would be willing to meet with staff from the office of the U. S. Bishops' Conference regarding the legislation being considered by the Senate Judiciary committee. We certainly appreciate the opportunity to have this meeting and hope that it can take place soon.

Sincerely yours,


+ Most Reverend Thomas C. Kelly, OP
Archbishop of Louisville


+ Most Reverend Roger J. Foys
Bishop of Covington


+ Most Reverend John J. McRaith
Bishop of Owensboro


+ Most Reverend Ronald W. Gainer
Bishop of Lexington