



CWS Strongly Opposes The RAISE Act, Urges Congress to Reject Anti-Family, Anti-Refugee Bill

Church World Service (CWS), a 71-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox communions, strongly opposes the “Reforming American Immigration for a Strong Economy” (RAISE) Act. We urge all Members of Congress to reject this anti-family and anti-refugee legislation introduced by Senators Cotton (R-AR) and Perdue (R-GA) and supported by President Trump.

The RAISE Act would permanently cap refugee admissions at 50,000 per year, the lowest resettlement goal in U.S. history, during the largest global refugee crisis in world history. Despite the sponsors’ citation of an arbitrary “13-year average”, the average annual resettlement goal between when Congress passed the 1980 Refugee Act and today has been 95,000, and the average number of resettled refugees has been 80,000.¹ Such a drastic, permanent cut to resettlement would reduce U.S. leadership abroad and tie the hands of the State Department in key diplomatic negotiations to encourage other countries to keep their doors open to refugees and allow refugees to work and refugee children to go to school. Refugee resettlement is a cost-effective form of humanitarian relief that is a lifeline for those who cannot return to their homes or rebuild their lives in a nearby country.² Refugees contribute meaningfully to the U.S. economy as earners and taxpayers, including more than \$56 billion in spending power.³

This bill dishonors the sanctity of families and commodifies the worth of individuals by making family reunification inaccessible and essentially only permitting individuals who have certain education levels, employment, and English-language ability to enter the United States. This bill would set the clock back on U.S. immigration policy, as these criteria would disproportionately discriminate against women and individuals from Africa, Asia, and South and Central America. Approximately 70 percent of women who enter through the U.S. immigration system do so through the family-based visa system.⁴ The bill would also eliminate the diversity visa - a move that is being celebrated by white nationalists.

The RAISE Act would eliminate the ability of U.S. citizens to sponsor their brothers and sisters, and create an impossible process for them to sponsor their parents for five-year visas, during which time the parents would not be able to work and the child would have to cover all expenses and health insurance costs. It would also stop green card holders from sponsoring their children over the age of 18. The bill would make the remaining family-based visas for spouses and children harder to access as well, by reducing the overall number of visas available based on the number of individuals who overstay their visas. RAISE would go a step further by barring individuals from applying for U.S. citizenship if their family sponsor has not reimbursed the government for any expenses incurred. As a Christian organization, we strongly believe that a parent’s desire to be with their children is real, regardless of age, and that the government should not be involved in separating brothers and sisters. The bill would also callously delete individuals’ applications for visas that it would eliminate, unless they have only one more year in the backlog. This would leave approximately four million people, who have been promised a visa but are waiting in line for it to become available, without any opportunity to reunite with their family members.⁵

Already, family-based visas are restricted to spouses, children, parents and siblings of U.S. Citizens and spouses and children of Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs, commonly referred to as “green card

¹ Migration Policy Institute analysis of WRAPS data from the Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, available at <http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>.

² The Century Foundation. “Why America Could—and Should—Admit More Syrian Refugees” <https://tcf.org/content/report/why-america-could-and-should-admit-more-syrian-refugees/>.

³ New American Economy. “From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America.” www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/NAE_Refugees_V5.pdf.

⁴ Kelly Jefferys, DHS Office of Immigration Statistics, Characteristic of Employment-Based Legal Permanent Residents. <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/EmploymentBased%20LPR%202004.pdf>.

⁵ “Annual Report of Immigrant Visa Applicants in the Family-sponsored and Employment-based preferences Registered at the National Visa Center as of November 1, 2016” US Department of State, Nov. 1, 2016. <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/Statistics/Immigrant-Statistics/WaitingListItem.pdf>

holders"). Due to tight numerical restrictions each year, backlogs average seven years, and can be as long as 23 years.⁶ When it is impossible to access the legal immigration system in a timely way, people resort to entering the United States however they can, including crossing borders illegally and overstaying visas. Given such lengthy waits, we urge Members of Congress to consider what they would do if they were separated from their loved ones. The real way to fix our outdated and inhumane immigration system is to modernize visa numbers to meet the needs of families, workers, and employers.

Assuming that an individual's future is bound by their past flies in the face of the American identity of opportunity, perseverance, self invention, and upward mobility. In fact, compared to employment-based immigrants, family migrants experience greater upward mobility.⁷ Refugees, many of whom have not had access to certain education and employment opportunities before arriving in the United States, start businesses at higher rates than immigrants overall.⁸ Sergey Brin, Google co-founder and president of Alphabet, came to the United States as a refugee, and Andrew Grove, founder and CEO of Intel, came to the United States to join family. In Cleveland alone, refugees have started more than 38 businesses, creating jobs for more than 141 employees.⁹ Family support helps all individuals, immigrants included, make important contributions to their communities. Family unity spurs integration, as families provide strong foundations for learning English, purchasing a home, pursuing job opportunities, starting a business, and preparing children for college.

Contrary to the RAISE Act, the Bible demonstrates the sacredness of a unified family. There are many examples of close relationships between adult children and their parents, including Abraham and Isaac, Mary and Jesus, and the mother- and daughter-in-law relationship of Ruth and Naomi. There are also examples of siblings remaining close as adults, including Mary and Martha, and disciples Simon Peter and Andrew, and James and John. Many people of faith first learned about the brokenness of the immigration system by witnessing families in their congregations suffer through separation due to visa backlogs, detention, and deportation. America needs, and deserves, an immigration system that prioritizes family unity. We can and must do better than this discriminatory, inhumane bill.

Overall, the RAISE Act would reduce legal immigration channels by 50-70 percent, with an 85 percent cut to family-based immigration, and would actually not, despite the sponsors' claims, increase skills-based immigration at all. It is important to note that the United States has low per-capita immigration rates compared with other developed nations. Already, the U.S. immigration rate is 28 percent below our nation's historic average, and the RAISE Act would reduce the immigration rate to one-third of the historic average.¹⁰ Moreover, the bill would do nothing to increase jobs or wages for the U.S.-born, as such policies have failed in the past since immigrants do not depress wages or reduce job growth.¹¹

CWS calls on Congress to reject the RAISE Act, which is an affront to family unity and the importance of diversity, and to instead support immigration and refugee policies that protect family unity and demonstrate the best of who we are as a country.

⁶ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs. "Visa Bulletin for July 2017."

<<https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/law-and-policy/bulletin/2017/visa-bulletin-for-july-2017.html>>.

⁷ Zoya Gubernskaya & Joanna Dreby, "US Immigration Policy and the Case for Family Unity." Center for Migration Studies, 2017. <http://cmsny.org/publications/jmhs-case-for-family-unity/?utm_source=Center+for+Migration+Studies+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=f5c84b2611-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_03_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_74e5cba118-f5c84b2611-81799309>

⁸ New American Economy. "From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America." <www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/NAE_Refugees_V5.pdf>.

⁹ Chmura Economics & Analytics. "Economic Impact of Refugees in the Cleveland Area." <<http://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/clevelandrefugeeeconomic-impact.pdf>>.

¹⁰ CATO Institute. "Senators Propose Great Depression Era Legal Immigration Rates—Claim It's the "Historical Norm" <www.cato.org/blog/senators-propose-great-depression-era-legal-immigration-rates-claim-its-historical-norm>.

¹¹ CATO Institute. "Sens. Cotton and Perdue's Bill to Cut Legal Immigration Won't Work and Isn't an Effective Bargaining Chip" <www.cato.org/blog/sens-cotton-perdues-bill-cut-legal-immigration-wont-work-isnt-effective-bargaining-chip>.