

200+ Advocates Offer Principles for Immigration Reform that Works for Children

U.S. House Hearing Today Begins Formal Legislative Process

For Immediate Release: February 5, 2013

Contact: Ed Walz, First Focus Campaign for Children 202-657-0685, or Jennifer Podkul, Women's Refugee Commission, 202-507-5385

Washington – More than 200 organizations representing children, immigrants, academia, faith traditions, and civil rights today released a [set of principles](#) for immigration reform legislation that meets the needs of children. The bipartisan children's advocacy organization First Focus and the Women's Refugee Commission led the effort to develop these principles, which have also been endorsed by the National Latino Children's Institute, Southern Poverty Law Center, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, MomsRising, the National Immigration Law Center, and a total of 205 organizations. The First Focus Campaign for Children [urged](#) U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee members to take these concerns into consideration during today's immigration policy hearing.

"Children of immigrants are one-fourth of the kids in America, so getting reform done means getting it right for kids," said First Focus President Bruce Lesley.

"The priorities of children need to be included in immigration reform—we cannot, yet again, compromise their basic rights to due process and protection," said Michelle Brané, Director of the Migrant Rights and Justice Program at the Women's Refugee Commission.

The groups' immigration reform principles include:

1. a roadmap to citizenship that is direct, clear, affordable, and reasonable;
2. protections for children's basic rights, including access to public services for children and families;
3. enforcement reforms that protect children's safety and well-being; and,
4. a commitment to keeping families together, through reform of family-sponsored immigration policy and enforcement.

Current immigration law largely ignores and often explicitly disregards the interests of children. For example, immigrants seeking hardship waivers of admissibility restrictions can seek relief based on harm to a close U.S. citizen son or daughter, but not if that son or daughter is under age 21. And whereas state governments acknowledge the fundamental differences between children and adults in matters of law enforcement, unaccompanied children taken into custody by federal Customs and Border Protection officers are treated the same as adults. Decades of such policy choices have produced an immigration system that routinely subjects children to harm and hardship. For example:

- 5.5 million children in mixed-status families are at risk of being separated from a parent at any time;
- 1 million undocumented children have no practical way to pursue education and contribute to their communities
- more than 200,000 parents of U.S. citizen children were deported between July 2010 and September 2012;
- an estimated 5,100 children are in state child welfare systems because federal immigration authorities have deported their parents; and
- unaccompanied alien children and children apprehended internally still are not afforded basic due process protections that we provide to others at risk of losing a fundamental right.

"Our national values recognize the unique needs of children, and many of our laws give children special protections," said Lesley. "It's time for our immigration policy to catch up and work in the best interest of children."

###

The First Focus Campaign for Children is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization affiliated with First Focus, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization. The Campaign for Children advocates directly for legislative change in Congress to ensure children and families are a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. For more information, visit www.ffcampaignforchildren.org.

The Women's Refugee Commission works to improve the lives and protect the rights of women, children and youth displaced by conflict and crisis. It is affiliated with and is legally part of the International Rescue Committee, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. For more information, visit www.womensrefugeecommission.org.