July 20, 2020

His Excellency Charles D. Baker
Office of the Governor
State House, Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Governor Baker,

As the bishops of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts and the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, we have the privilege of ministering to over 60,000 Episcopalians across the Commonwealth. Our ministry with and for residents of this Commonwealth is without regard to their immigration status.

It is in this context that we write to urge you to support the passing of two essential pieces of immigration legislation: the Work and Family Mobility Act (WFMA) and the Safe Communities Act.

The Episcopal Church, by action of its governing body, the General Convention, affirms “policies that deemphasize immigrant enforcement action against those who have not committed felony crimes, and reaffirm[s] our church’s support...[for enabling] undocumented immigrants who have established roots in the United States and are often parents and spouses of U.S. citizens to have a pathway to legalization and to full social and economic integration into the United States.” [2018-C009, 79th General Convention, The Episcopal Church]

We assert this position as faithful to the directive repeated many times in holy Scripture:

“The Lord your God ... executes justice for the orphan and the widow, ... [and] loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 10:17-19 NRSV)

“Do not mistreat or abuse foreigners who live among you. Remember, you were foreigners in Egypt.” (Exodus 22:21 CEV)

One of the marks of biblical hospitality is to welcome the stranger as one’s own. This type of welcome requires that we ensure that foreigners, immigrants in our case, are given the just and equal means to pursue life, liberty, and happiness in our country.

However, our current legal system does not operate on this principle.

In immigrant communities, residents are fearful of reaching out to public safety authorities due to the risk that someone might report their presence, or the presence of a loved one, to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). This fear increases rates of domestic violence, leads to unreported wage theft, and, most recently, has caused immigrant communities to suffer unjust ramifications of COVID-19. The Safe Communities Act seeks to protect the basic rights of immigrants by separating public safety and civil immigration matters.
Similarly, the Work and Family Mobility Act (WFMA) extends basic rights to all immigrants in the form of a driver’s license. As it stands, undocumented immigrants are forced to move — to work, to school, to medical appointments — without a license, terrified that they will be pulled over and deported. This is not conducive to a life of peace and dignity, nor to safety for the wider community. If the WFMA is passed, the number of drivers in Massachusetts who have taken a driving exam and the number of insured drivers would increase.

Our Commonwealth is home to an estimated 210,000 undocumented immigrants; our faith instructs us that each one of these lives is as valuable as ours. As faith leaders in Massachusetts we urge you to create a legal system that recognizes this truth. It is in this biblical spirit of hospitality that we ask you to withdraw your veto threat and commit to signing the Safe Communities Act and the Work and Family Mobility Act if they pass vote in the Senate and House.

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Alan Gates
Bishop Diocesan
Diocese of Massachusetts

The Rt. Rev. Douglas Fisher
Bishop Diocesan
Diocese of Western Massachusetts

The Rt. Rev. Gayle Harris
Bishop Suffragan
Diocese of Massachusetts

The Rev. Arrington Chambliss
Executive Director
Episcopal City Mission