

March 15, 2016

Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Members of the United States House of Representatives and Senate Appropriations
Subcommittees on Homeland Security,

We, the undersigned faith-based organizations, write to urge you to eliminate the immigrant bed quota currently required in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) budget.

The stipulation in the DHS appropriations legislation states that, “funding made available under this heading shall maintain a level of not less than 34,000 detention beds.” Some members of Congress have interpreted this in recent years to mean that the U.S. government should be filling all of those 34,000 beds at all times, not just maintaining them for potential use. Neither the appropriations language nor this interpretation is in line with the values of our many faith traditions.

We are called as people of faith to seek just and humane policies for our communities, our congregations and our country. We are told in the Bible that “You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 22:21). Adhering to an arbitrarily determined detention quota is exceptional for any agency, but it is particularly alarming in the context of our nation’s immigration system. By mandating that 34,000 beds be maintained any given time, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents face pressure to round up and detain community members for longer than necessary. The institutional pressure to fill already-paid-for beds comes at the expense of ICE agents exercising essential discretion in their day-to-day jobs and exacerbates the traumatizing effects of detention on immigrant communities.

Furthermore, the bed quota perpetuates excessive detention in lieu of answering the true needs of the nation. The quota costs more than \$2 billion a year, money that would be better spent investing in alternatives to detention. Communities of faith are often at the forefront of providing services to those most in need, and we have seen firsthand the potential for successfully employing alternative policies that minimize detention and its serious physical and psychological effects. Community-based alternatives to detention facilitate attendance at court proceedings while ensuring the individual maintain proper access to doctors, lawyers and other support, including remaining in the presence of their families.

By all accounts, the bed quota is not well-measured policy, and it is long past time that Congress reconsiders it. We ask that you eliminate the requirement from the Department of Homeland Security budget during the appropriations process this year.

Sincerely,

Africa Faith & Justice Network (AFJN)

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good

Center of Concern

Church World Service

Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Disciples Center for Public Witness

Franciscan Action Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Ignatian Solidarity Network

Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States

Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Council of Churches

National Justice for Our Neighbors

NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Office of Social Justice of the Christian Reformed Church

Pax Christi USA

Refugee & Immigration Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Institute Justice Team

The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society

Union for Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Association

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries