



ST. FRANCIS COMMUNITY SERVICES

**IMMIGRATION
POLICY PLATFORM**



St. Francis
community services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

St. Francis Community Services has worked with immigrants in the St. Louis region for more than thirty years, acting as a support and witness as new families call St. Louis home. Immigrants form a vital piece of our community: they are our neighbors, friends, coworkers, and a part of our families. We remain committed to offering social and legal services to our immigrant neighbors, regardless of their immigration status. This platform is a reflection of the lack of policy protections that we have observed. It is also an acknowledgment that systemic change is necessary to create lasting change in the lives of our clients.

Over recent years, we have witnessed our government take an increasingly punitive approach towards immigration. The United States not only has a long history of immigration but also a long history of anti-immigrant sentiment. In light of fear being used as a tool of oppression, we are called to boldly advocate for policies that respect the human dignity of our immigrant neighbors.

As people of faith, we remember that every immigration policy decision directly impacts the lives of people. We demand systematic, lasting change that reflects the five basic principles of Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration. While we call on our government to pass comprehensive immigration reform, we will continue to support local and statewide policies that treat immigrants with compassion, dignity, and respect. The following pillars guide our advocacy efforts:

**MERCIFUL
AND JUST
IMMIGRATION
SYSTEM**

**EXPANDED
ACCESS TO
LEGAL
STATUS**

**ABILITY
TO LIVE
WITH
DIGNITY**

We recognize that we live in an ever-changing world, where migration will increase in prevalence. Therefore, policy must change to address the needs and realities of migrants. This platform articulates our ambitions amidst the current political climate.

OUR VALUES

Welcoming our neighbor is not a political issue; it is an issue of our identity as members of the Catholic Church and as followers of Jesus. Our faith calls us to meet every person with mercy and compassion. We believe that all people are deserving of basic human rights, including the right to migrate.

Jesus affirms strongly and unequivocally that we must welcome the stranger. His teachings also tell us that humanity forms a united family where all are equal in dignity and rights. For these reasons, we believe in tearing down the walls that separate us and building bridges that connect cultures, peoples, and families.

We see ourselves in the immigrants we serve. In recognition of our mutual struggles, we are called to stand in solidarity with migrants.

Five Catholic Principles of Migration

1. Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.
2. Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.
3. Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders but must do so with justice and mercy.
4. Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protections.
5. The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected.

MERCIFUL AND JUST IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

Because Congress has not acted to pass comprehensive immigration reform, presidents have issued a series of executive orders, some of which have fostered unjust practices. Catholic Social Teaching says that people have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families. However, our government too often criminalizes immigrants solely because they have migrated, especially immigrants of color. Mass incarceration of migrants, for example, separates families and strips them of their dignity. We need comprehensive immigration reform that is just, merciful, and values human dignity.

POLICY PRIORITIES

Decouple federal immigration enforcement from local policing

Local police should never act as ICE agents. Such cooperation results in heightened fear among immigrant communities. It discourages undocumented immigrants from reporting crimes, which diminishes public safety overall. “Show me your papers” laws lead to practices of racial profiling and unlawful arrest. The relationship between local law enforcement and minority communities needs to be strengthened not strained.

Protect and bolster the asylum and refugee processes

Although an internationally protected right, asylum is increasingly difficult to obtain. The denial rate has climbed to 65%.¹ Refugee resettlement in the U.S. has also dropped to historic lows. As a country of immigrants, the United States should be a haven for those facing persecution. All asylum seekers should have the opportunity to safely present themselves at a port of entry and make their plea. Following this, their cases should be processed in a humane and efficient manner subject to consistent and equitable standards.

Ensure due process for all immigrants

Everyone is entitled to due process, regardless of citizenship status. However, our current immigration system denies migrants of their right to make a full and fair plea. The majority of individuals in immigration court do not have legal counsel. Policy changes, such as expedited removal and tent courts, further threaten migrants’ legal rights. Our values of justice and fairness only stand strong when due process is upheld.

End all forms of immigration detention

Detention has developed from a modest, temporary solution into a vast machine incarcerating hundreds of thousands of migrants each year. Detention conditions are deplorable, only providing minimal access to hygiene and medical care. Migrants who are detained for a prolonged period of time are at an increased risk of experiencing physical and mental health problems, including depression, PTSD, and suicidality. Community-based alternatives are more consistent with human welfare and dignity. Not only do they offer a framework that is more welcoming, they are also vastly more effective and economical than a detention-based approach.

“If we stopped making life so unbearable for asylum-seekers, for the poor arriving at our shores — we are spending immense resources to literally make their lives as miserable as possible”

-Ruben Garcia

1. <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/539/#f1>

EXPANDED ACCESS TO LEGAL STATUS

Due to narrow pathways, insufficient quotas, and processing backlogs, many people are unable to migrate legally to the United States. Living without status in this country can strip migrants of their humanity. Undocumented immigrants, especially those of color, face discrimination in their workplace, at school, and by police. Congress must enact legislation to permanently protect these indispensable members of our society. Policies should also be implemented that make it easier for future generations to come here legally.

POLICY PRIORITIES

Offer a pathway to citizenship for the millions of undocumented immigrants currently living in our country

Approximately two-thirds of unauthorized immigrant adults have lived in the United States for over a decade.² They are woven into the fabric of our country. Our communities are stronger and more diverse thanks to them. Bringing them legally into the workforce will stimulate the economy, increasing consumption and tax revenue. Immigrants typically complement American workers rather than compete directly with them for jobs, offering a solution to the United States' workforce shortage. As integral members of our society, they deserve equal rights and protections. Offering a pathway to citizenship is both the moral choice and the pragmatic one.

Permanently protect those with Temporary Protected Status

People should not be unduly sent back to countries that are unable to care for them. The countries awaiting a final decision on their designation are some of the most dangerous countries in the world. People with TPS have established lives in the United States that are no longer temporary. They have built families, businesses, and community. Thus, they should be provided with a path to lawful permanent residence or citizenship.

Protect and bolster legal immigration pathways

In the United States, immigrants have been a unique source of cultural and economic strength. They are innovators, job creators, and consumers with an enormous spending power that drives our economy and creates employment opportunities for all Americans. Statistics show that immigrants are significantly more likely to start businesses and file patents than native-born citizens. We must oppose any unnecessary obstacles to legal immigration and support pathways for those seeking to achieve the American Dream.

Eliminate backlogs in immigration processing

The wait for a visa can be over 20 years depending on one's country of origin.⁴ In addition, the backlogged deportation docket pending in immigration courts exceeds 1 million cases and continues to grow at a rapid pace.⁵ Our clients have court dates that are set years from now, meaning their case is dependent upon an uncertain political environment. This is unacceptable. People have the right to have their case heard within a reasonable timeframe.

4,100,000

U.S. CITIZEN CHILDREN
HAVE A PARENT THAT IS
UNDOCUMENTED³

2. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/12/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/>

3. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/us-citizen-children-impacted-immigration-enforcement>

4. <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-bulletin/2020/visa-bulletin-for-october-2019.html>

5. <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/536/>

ABILITY TO LIVE WITH DIGNITY

We believe that everyone should be able to meet their basic needs, regardless of their legal status, native language, or race. Immigrants face many barriers in obtaining necessary resources, like education and healthcare. Even for those who are able to access resources, our systems are extremely difficult to navigate. This is amplified for people whose native language is not English. God's greatest command is to "love your neighbor as yourself." Showing love to all of our neighbors, and ensuring that they are able to live with dignity is a requirement of our faith.

POLICY PRIORITIES

Offer undocumented students in-state tuition rates

Five years ago, public colleges and universities in Missouri were directed to charge undocumented immigrants international tuition rates. This has forced many of our clients to attend colleges in Kansas, Illinois, and Arkansas, draining talent from our state. We demand access to affordable higher education for undocumented students in Missouri.

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS PAY **3X** THE TUITION OF THEIR MISSOURI PEERS ⁶

Institute housing and tenant protections for migrants

Undocumented immigrants should not have to worry about intimidation and retaliation from their landlords. Landlords should be prohibited from disclosing or threatening to disclose information about a tenant's immigration status. It is also important that all housing legislation recognizes the various cultures that are present in the community. Everyone has the right to safe, secure, habitable, and affordable housing.

Ensure linguistic access

In both word and action, resources must be provided for people with limited English proficiency. Access to language assistance not only needs to be expanded but also practiced. Language should not be a barrier to obtaining needed services.

Extend healthcare coverage and other public benefits to immigrants, regardless of status

Contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of undocumented workers pay taxes. Despite paying into the system, they do not have access to Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP, or the Marketplace and thus have extremely high uninsured rates. Without access to insurance, many undocumented immigrants forgo needed care and end up in the emergency room. Fears around the public charge rule, a rule that changes how the use of public benefits will affect one's ability to enter the United States or obtain a green card, are also leading documented immigrants to follow this pattern. Healthcare is a human right and should be available to everyone in this country.

MISSOURI FACT

In 2017, immigrants paid \$630.1 million more in taxes than they used in public services⁷

6. <https://themissouritimes.com/60858/missouri-immigration-policy-coalition-dismayed-with-legislatures-bait-and-switch-maneuver-on-tuition-rates-for-undocumented-students/>

7. <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/missouri/>

Expand access to legal services

The legal system is complex and difficult to navigate. Immigrants often lack preparation, resources, and information. This creates fear around bringing a claim to court. To give individuals a voice, we must expand access to legal services.

Provide undocumented immigrants with a form of identification

Identification is a necessary form of protection against expedited removal. It also ensures access to certain public and private services. Identification cards, whether driver's licenses or parish IDs, are a symbol of inclusion and reduce fear among the immigrant community.

“When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt”

Leviticus 19: 33-34

“Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it”

Hebrews 13: 1-2

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me”

Matthew 25:35



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