



# Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

August 2013:

## The 'Do or Die' Moment for Winning Fair and Humane Immigration Reform

An LIRS Toolkit for Action  
August to September 2013

### Introduction:

*"August is a month in which either legislative proposals die, or they survive."— Sen. Robert Menendez, (D-NJ), co-author of the Senate immigration reform bill (July 18, 2013).*

*"I pay more attention to what I hear in my district than what I do from various groups," — Rep. Charles Boustany, (R-LA) (July 18, 2013).*

The quotes above confirm what we all know: We are at a pivotal moment in our efforts to pass a compassionate immigration reform bill that truly embodies our biblical call to **welcome the stranger**.

The urgency of this moment is why LIRS is calling on all Lutherans to rise up, *take action* and be an effective voice for immigrants and refugees at this critical moment in our nation's history.

The Senate passed a bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform bill ([S.744](#)) in June, but the House of Representatives has yet to show the same kind of bipartisan leadership. While new polls show that a majority of Americans support immigration reform and respectable reports including one from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) have shown that immigration reform will boost the economy and reduce our budget deficit, House Republican leaders are promoting a piecemeal approach to reform that promises, at most, to tinker with a few of the myriad ways our immigration system is broken. Even worse, harmful immigration legislation has advanced on partisan votes through House committees. One of these bills is the [SAFE Act](#), which would make it a crime to provide assistance or transportation to an undocumented person, would mandate even **more detention** of immigrants, while expanding a program that encourages **racial profiling**.

***We have come too far in our struggle to be turned around now. The time is now for people of faith to raise our voices in support for compassionate immigration reform.***

As Lutherans, we are called to bear prophetic witness to God's love for all people, welcome the strangers in our midst, and stand in solidarity with migrants and refugees. The time is now to put the maximum pressure on members of the House of Representatives to pass immigration reform legislation that unites migrant and refugee families and provides a roadmap to citizenship for undocumented aspiring Americans.

Congress will be home on recess from August 3rd to September 8th. This is a **critical and opportune time** for communities of faith to make our voices heard on immigration reform. We must remind House Members of God's love for the sojourner, and that the time is now to pass a comprehensive immigration reform bill that aligns with our [principles](#).

LIRS has developed this toolkit with a menu of actions to help amplify your voices at this critical moment in our campaign. We are asking Lutherans across the country to prayerfully reflect on **taking action** to support immigration reform during this August recess period. Here are five ways you can be a powerful voice during recess:

- **Make your support for immigration reform visible.** LIRS offers lawn signs showing Lutheran support for compassionate immigration reform. These signs can be placed in front of churches and homes. To request lawn signs, please visit our [website](#) and we will be happy to put them in the mail to you.
- **Engage your congregation.** You can organize immigration reform [prayer vigils](#) and a [Stand for Welcome Sunday](#). Invite your representative and the media and help build Lutheran interest in working for humane immigration reform.
- **Organize an in-district visit to your representative:** Recess is a great opportunity to meet with your representative and their staff in his or her district offices, letting them know Lutherans support compassionate and humane immigration reform.
- **Increase the faith presence at town hall meetings:** Some representatives will be hosting town hall meetings. These are great opportunities to meet your representative and raise the voice of the faith community.
- **Prepare for the National Interfaith 40 Days of Fasting, Prayer, and Action.** LIRS is working with a broad coalition of interfaith groups to launch a nationwide action of fasting, prayer, and action in support of immigration reform starting the Sunday after Labor Day. It's important that as many Lutheran congregations as possible sign up to participate in this action. We will send out information to sign up when the registration site becomes live.

To help you get started, LIRS has drafted talking points for in-district visits, sample media advisories to alert the press of events taking place at your church or in your community, and suggested ways to use letters to the editor and op-eds to amplify your message.

Contact Folabi Olagbaju ([folagbaju@lirs.org](mailto:folagbaju@lirs.org) | 202-626-7931) if you would like support for your grassroots activities and to keep us posted on your plans!

If you haven't already, sign up [for Stand for Welcome messages](#) to receive regular updates from LIRS on actions you can take to support migrant and refugee rights. You can also always visit our online [Action Center](#) to send a message directly to your elected officials in support of compassionate immigration reform.

## **Planning your in-district visit**

1. **Find out who represents you in the House.** Go to [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) to find out who your U.S. representative is.
2. **Know his/her record on immigration reform.** Find out how your representative votes on immigration issues. Their websites and a Google search will give you a good picture of their voting record and what they've said about immigration reform. We will work closely with the LIRS Advocacy Team should you need help researching additional information. Please contact [Folabi Olagbaju](mailto:Folabi.Olagbaju) for research assistance or for specific inquires, the LIRS Advocacy Team at [dc@lirs.org](mailto:dc@lirs.org).
3. **Pull together a delegation.** There are a number of ways you can make this a powerful meeting. Either meet with your representative along with members of your congregation alone, or reach out to other faith groups in the district he or she represents. It is always good to include people (migrants, clergy, business owners, etc.) who will be directly impacted by a change in the immigration laws so they can share their stories and show how the current system impacts your community. Plan for 5-10 people in the delegation, although a larger delegation can be a powerful sign of how the issue resonates in your community. If you have a big delegation, check with your representative's scheduler to make sure the space can accommodate the group. Your delegation should meet and plan together well in advance so that your meeting is well-run and focused, with everyone understanding their role.
4. **Schedule a meeting.** Call, fax, or email the local office of your representative to request a meeting. If the member is unavailable, ask to meet with his/her staffer who works on immigration issues.
5. **Prepping for your meeting.** The LIRS [guide](#) to meeting with your elected officials walks you through how to prepare for and structure a meeting with a congressional office. This is your chance to talk about how Lutherans and other people of faith are called to welcome the newcomer, share the work you do in your community, and urge the member to support comprehensive immigration reform that aligns with our five principals. Also, for the most up-to-date information on the progress of immigration reform bill in the House, please visit our [website](#) before your meeting.

## **Talking points for in-district visits:**

**Before the meeting, it's important to learn about your issues and decide on the key things you'll request that the representative do for you (the "ask").** During the August recess, many House members will be checking their constituents' views on immigration reform before returning to Washington, D.C. after Labor Day. This is an important moment for the voices of communities of faith to be heard calling for compassionate and fair reform. Below is a set of LIRS's five core principles in support for comprehensive immigration reform. An analysis is also available in a [single document](#).

[Family unity:](#) As passed, S. 744 would reduce family separation due to lengthy visa wait times and immigration enforcement actions. However, the bill falls short, as U.S. citizens would no longer be able to petition to reunify with certain relatives.

[Roadmap to citizenship:](#) LIRS applauds the creation of an earned roadmap to citizenship for undocumented immigrants included in S. 744. We ask elected officials ensure the roadmap remains as fair and accessible as possible.

[Refugees and asylum seekers:](#) S. 744 increases protections for unaccompanied children, refugees, and asylum seekers. We are urging that a similar bill move forward in the House, and we ask elected officials to maintain these protections in that legislation.

[Humane Enforcement:](#) LIRS supports provisions in S. 744 that increase due process and the use of alternatives to detention. We ask elected officials to maintain and expand these protections to ensure the humane treatment of migrants in our immigration enforcement systems.

[Protections for workers:](#) While S. 744 mandates national use of an electronic employment verification system, such as E-Verify, the bill includes measures designed to protect U.S. citizens and others who are erroneously flagged by the system. We ask elected officials to ensure the protection of worker's rights is a priority in House legislation.

**Sample framing for your request:** *The United States is a nation of immigrants and a country built on values, founded on an idea that all men and women are created equally. The way we treat new immigrants speaks volumes to our commitment to the values that defines us as Americans. A recent CBO report estimates that enacting S.744 would decrease the federal budget deficit and result in net gain for the economy. Can we count on your support for a humane and compassionate immigration reform bill in the House? How can we best support you in our mutual goal?*

**After your visit:**

Please let us know how your meeting went. It is important for our advocacy efforts to learn what your representative shared with you during the meeting. After you meet with or speak with your representative, please send a brief summary of the meeting to the LIRS Grassroots Mobilization Team ([folagbaju@lirs.org](mailto:folagbaju@lirs.org)). We will then follow up with the member's staff in Washington, D.C. to reinforce your meeting.

**Attracting media coverage of prayer vigils, in-district meetings, and other events:**

Immigration reform is a hot topic in the media right now, and an in-district meeting with your representative or an event hosted at your church or in your community will be of great interest to local media. Positive news coverage about your meeting with your Member of Congress in a local paper can help raise the profile of the issue in your community and help foster a good relationship between your congregation and the elected official.

As you plan your event or meeting, remember that media coverage can be a draw for the representative and raise community awareness of the need for reform. However, getting media attention can take a lot of work and could be a drawback with your representative, depending on his/her position on the issue. This is where doing your research on the representative's position on immigration reform can help with your approach.

Media advisories and press releases are good ways to let your local media know that this event is happening, invite their presence, and to raise the profile of people of faith standing for welcome. Below is a sample media advisory.

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### Sample Media Advisory Template

For Immediate Release:

Contact: NAME, PHONE ##

August XX, 2013

**\*\*\*MEDIA ADVISORY\*\*\***

**TUESDAY AUGUST 20, 2013 at 10:30 a.m. (ET)**

**[Church Name] Congregations and Local Community Keep Up Momentum for Immigration Reform**

***Faith Leaders and Families Invite Congresswoman on Recess to Family Prayer Vigil***

**[Town, State]** – We are at a pivotal moment in the effort to reform our broken immigration system as the comprehensive immigration debate heads to the House of Representative following the passage of the bill in the Senate by a large bi-partisan vote.

Members of **[Congregation Name]** will demonstrate their support and raise their voices for compassionate immigration reform at an interfaith prayer vigil. The prayer vigil is an opportunity for communities of faith to come together and reflect on the scriptural bases of our advocacy in support of comprehensive immigration reform and the consequences of our failed immigration policies. The event is timed to coincide with the Congressional August recess so Members of the House of Representative can know communities of faith in the [your town] area support immigration reform and that the time is now for a comprehensive immigration reform bill. **[Representative XXX]** has been invited to attend the prayer vigil.

**WHAT:**

**WHAT:** {Congregation Name} Organizes Faith & Immigration Reform Prayer Vigil

**WHEN:** DATE AND TIME

**WHERE:** LOCATION

**SPEAKERS:** NAME, TITLE

### **Publishing Letters to the Editor or Op-Eds:**

These are two of the most powerful ways you can reach hundreds or even thousands of people with key messages about the need for fair and compassionate immigration reform. The LIRS media relations staff can support you in getting your newspaper to publish your op-ed or letter to the editor. Contact LIRS Assistant Director for Media Relations Jon Pattee at [jpattee@lirs.org](mailto:jpattee@lirs.org) if you would like support for media coverage of your grassroots activities.

### **Social Media:**

Making good use of social media to engage a wider audience and publicize your events is a hugely important way to advance the cause of fair immigration reform.

*Facebook:* Create an event page and invite your friends to attend your prayer vigil or Stand for Welcome Sunday. Take photos at the event and post to your Facebook page. Tag friends in the photo as a way to show their support for the event. Use a Facebook app on your smartphone to upload photos and quotes quickly and cross-post to local immigration coalitions' Facebook pages.

*Twitter:* Ask members of your congregation to tweet using the hashtags that follow: @LIRSorg; #Lutherans; #CIR; #TimeIsNow; #familyunity. Suggested Tweets:

- #Lutherans support compassionate immigration reform. #CIR
- @LIRSorg Stands for Welcome. The #TimeIsNow that we treat all people with dignity, and create a roadmap to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.
- My Faith Tradition teaches me to welcome the strangers in our midst and love my neighbor. #familyunity #timeisnow
- We just had a meeting with @[REPRESENTATIVE\_NAME] to let him/her know #Lutherans support compassionate immigration reform. #TimeIsNow
- Faith communities welcome a roadmap to citizenship and ask for #familyunity. #CIR
- #Lutherans pray for compassionate #CIR.



# Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

## August Recess Town Hall Toolkit

### How to Make Your Voice Heard at a Town Hall Meeting

The August recess, which stretches from August 5-September 6, is the critical month when we either win or lose the fight for comprehensive immigration reform. Many members of Congress hold town hall meetings during this recess to interact with their constituents. Town hall meetings offer an immediate and great opportunity to impress your pro-immigration reform stance on your representative by asking well-reasoned questions that also make a point. If your representative understands that key constituents feel passionately about the need to pass a compassionate reform bill, they'll convey the need to act to the House leadership.

Below are some useful tips for participating in a town hall meeting and increasing your chances of being heard. Following the tips below are some important extra tips on how to phrase a question, whether spoken or written.

1. **Get there early**
2. **Find out right away how questions are being taken – spoken or written? – and submit them or get on a list if possible**
3. **Sit near microphones if they are set up**
4. **Go with questions already written on index cards, so you have them on hand if they ask for written questions**
5. **Ask questions that include facts**
6. **If you come with friends, don't all sit together**
7. **Ask questions that tell a story**
8. **Make your participation visible**
9. **Make yourself available to the press**
10. **Be polite and courteous**

Here are more details on these tips:

**1. Get there early.** Chances are that you weren't invited to the meeting or someone from the LIRS office brought the meeting to your attention. Try to arrive at least an hour early to increase your chance of getting into the meeting.

**2.** When you get to the meeting site, immediately **ask the greeters or someone who's in charge the exact procedure for submitting questions.** If you must submit written questions, do so right away. If the questions will be spoken, add your name to the list, if there is one, or sit strategically close to the microphone or raise your hand, depending on the process.

**3. Sit by the microphone** even if questions are supposed to be submitted in writing. You never know what chances will open up. If there is a microphone set up, plant yourself near it so you don't end up in the back of the question line. If other people start lining up to ask questions before they are invited to do so, you should too.

**4. Come with questions written down on index cards.** Some representatives and their staff will try to control the questions by taking them in writing. If you have your questions already prepared when you arrive, you have a better chance of having your question answered.

**5. Have a few facts at your fingertips.** It is important to be accurate and prepared when raising the often emotional topic of immigration. Having a few facts ready will give you an edge. For example, a recent [Gallup poll](#) shows that 71 percent of adult Americans feel it is extremely important that we pass a new immigration law on how we treat undocumented immigrants currently in the country and 88 percent support an immigration reform bill with a pathway to citizenship. Use facts in the [LIRS Comprehensive Immigration Mythbuster](#) to support your case and as a handout to attendees.

**6. If you come with friends, don't all sit together.** There is strength in numbers, even perceived numbers. If you are literally all over the place, the opposition will feel like immigration supporters were dominating the room.

**7. Ask questions that tell the story, but don't ramble.** Often, members of Congress will read the written question out loud, so submit questions that make your point. Instead of, "Please explain whether you support immigration reform," ask, "Do you support the separation of families caused by our broken immigration system?" Succinct questions are better received than longwinded statements.

**8. Make your participation visible.** Make sure you have a camera on hand to document your participation. LIRS also has [CIR lawn signs](#) and other visibility material like buttons that you can request to take to display at the venue.

**9. Make yourself available to the press,** if they're on hand for the event. You may be able to spot them. There's nothing wrong with hanging around them before or after the event, doing your best to look like the kind of person they want to interview.

...and finally

**10. Thank the representative.** Let him or her know that you'll be praying for him or her to do the right thing on immigration reform.

### **Important Extra Tips on Spoken and Written Questions**

**1. Oral questions: Make a point in the form of a question, quickly. For example:**

Hi, my name is ----- and I'm a resident of -----. We are a nation of immigrants and American success and prosperity would not be possible without generations of immigrants who have made this country their own.

My faith as a Lutheran teaches me to welcome the stranger in our midst, bear prophetic witness to God's love for all people, and stand in solidarity with migrants and refugees.

Would you commit to supporting an immigration reform bill that includes a roadmap to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, improves the lives of refugees and asylum seekers, keeps families together, includes humane and just enforcement, and protects U.S. citizen and migrant workers?

**2. Written questions: Make a point in the form of a question, with a little more detail.**

America is a nation of immigrants and successive generations of immigrants have made and continue to make tremendous contributions to our country. My faith as a Lutheran teaches me to welcome the stranger in our midst, bear prophetic witness to God's love for all people, and stand in solidarity with migrants and refugees.

Would you commit to supporting an immigration reform bill that includes a roadmap to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, improves the lives of refugees and asylum seekers, keeps families together, includes humane and just enforcement, and protects U.S. citizen and migrant workers?

We are clearly at a critical and pivotal moment in our struggle to fix the broken immigration system. But we are confident that your great efforts and ongoing commitment will result in the passage of a bill that includes a roadmap to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, improves the lives of refugees and asylum seekers, keeps families together, includes humane and just enforcement, and protects U.S. citizen and migrant workers. Thanks so much for attending a town hall meeting and for taking other actions promoted in our [August Recess Toolkit](#).

Please contact Folabi Olagbaju ([folagbaju@lirs.org](mailto:folagbaju@lirs.org) | 202-626-7931) and let him know if you take any action during this August recess and if you would like support for any of your grassroots activities!

If you haven't already, sign up [for our Stand for Welcome alerts](#) to receive regular updates from LIRS on advocacy for and with migrants and refugees. You can also always visit our online [Action Center](#) to tell elected officials you support compassionate immigration reform.