

# Congress: Don't Sacrifice Basic Human Rights in U.S. Border Communities When Reforming Immigration

America is founded on the ideals that families should stick together, that hard work should be rewarded, that those fleeing persecution should find refuge on our shores, and that our justice system should give due process and a fair day in court to everyone who comes before it.

The immigration reform bill passed by the U.S. Senate last month goes a long way to restoring these values, but trading off increased militarization along U.S. borders for a roadmap to citizenship sells our American values short.

There is no doubt that our country needs a roadmap to citizenship for the 11 million aspiring Americans who live and work in the shadows in this country. Most everyone agrees that the current patchwork of policies and programs is broken. For those currently striving for citizenship, the existing maze of regulations provides no light at the end of the tunnel – no “line” to get into for becoming a fully participating American. But further militarizing the border is not going to fix that broken system.

The broken immigration system has a very real impact on people's lives. People like Dolores, who fled persecution and violence in her home country looking for safety in the United States. But border officers summarily deported her, returning her to continued persecution, and she fled again. And, because she once had been deported, when she returned to the U.S. she was subject to mandatory detention, denied the right to seek asylum, and spent 22 months in jail awaiting the outcome of her protection case.

For decades the United States has poured money into a military infrastructure complete with personnel, technology, even drones. Since 1986 the United States has spent more than \$186 billion in immigration enforcement, including \$11.7 billion to border security in 2012 alone – an 85% increase in spending since 2005. Today over 21,000 border patrol agents (in addition to 20,000 other U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency employees) are stationed at our borders, subject to scant oversight on use of force, racial profiling, or community policing. Over 650 miles of fencing have been built, at a cost of billions of dollars and the waiver of over 30 environmental protection laws.

Today the rhetoric – and the lobbyists – of war permeate the discussion around border policy as defense contractors, looking for new opportunities, push hard for defense technology applications in the immigration reform bill. So far, they have been rewarded with \$46 billion allocated in the Senate bill to border security.

Building a commonsense immigration system that reflects American values won't be easy, but the essential elements are no mystery:

- Provide an authentic roadmap to citizenship for undocumented people already here so that everyone in our country can live and work with dignity and get in a real line for becoming a U.S. citizen.
- Eliminate unconscionable backlogs in family-based immigration that keep families separated for years and even decades.
- Create predictable means for future immigration that meet America's needs and that provide women with an opportunity equal to men to participate in that immigration.
- Ensure that our justice system works by treating people equally, basing decisions on evidence rather than racial stereotypes, and providing due process and fair treatment under the law including access to lawyers, hearings in front of judges who have discretion to consider the individual circumstances of cases, and to appeals.
- Institute oversight to ensure humane treatment when detaining people in immigration custody.
- Provide robust and efficient protection to refugees and asylum seekers.

This summer, for the first time in decades, U.S. Congress has a real chance to build an immigration system that imparts justice to people like Dolores, rather than with arbitrary detention and denial of a fair day in court.

The U.S. House has a choice: continue to focus on piecemeal enforcement bills that fail to create a workable immigration system or deliver an immigration proposal that moves America forward together with a roadmap to citizenship, a sensible immigration system, and enforcement that lives up to our American values.