Dear Members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives,

The United Church of Christ works to offer an extravagant welcome to all of God’s children regardless of their national origin or citizenship status. Many of our congregations are working to become Immigrant Welcoming Congregations because we understand we have a moral imperative to welcome the most vulnerable in our midst.

We urge all members of Congress to speak out in support of deferred action for families and pursue commonsense immigration reform. The United Church of Christ (UCC) has passed resolution after resolution, year after year at our General Synods in support of humane and compassionate immigration reform.\(^1\) True immigration reform based on real solutions must create a pathway to citizenship for the estimated 11 million undocumented people living in the United States. Given the absence of congressional action, we ask you to support expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA+) and the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) that will provide relief from deportation and family separation for over 4 million people.

Tell the Administration to stop the raids and end Operation Border Guardian. The UCC has significantly invested in Central American asylum seekers to help them rebuild their lives in safety. We remain very disappointed by the Obama Administration’s decision to plant fear throughout the immigrant community through the recent raids, starting January 2nd of this year, designed to send people back to the most dangerous countries in the world. These raids are an inhumane and unjust response to the humanitarian crisis that has caused thousands to flee the horrific realities of brutal violence and extreme poverty in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Instead of deporting families seeking safety, the Administration should see that they are provided adequate representation to seek asylum. We urge members of Congress to tell the Administration to stop the raids and end Operation Border Guardian that has targeted unaccompanied children for deportation and has left people in fear of being separated from their families.

We call on Congress to respect current U.S. asylum law, honor existing protections for victims of human trafficking, and expand legal assistance. We must ensure the right to due process for each individual; we cannot roll back protections outlined in the bi-partisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008 that would result in children being returned back into the hands of traffickers, gangs, and others who seek to exploit them. The 2008 TVPRA provides the lifesaving process to identify and protect unaccompanied children who are victims of trafficking or persecution.\(^2\) This process is strong and should be expanded to cover unaccompanied children from Mexico, as well. We urge all members of Congress to support the “Fair Day in Court for Kids Act” (S. 2540/H.R. 4646) that will provide legal assistance to unaccompanied children to assist them in their asylum application processes. Special attention should be given to transgender asylum seekers, who are often fleeing violence on account of their gender identity and who should not be held in detention, where abuses against the transgender population are rampant while awaiting adjudication of their cases.

Congress should tell the Administration to cease Operation Streamline and the prosecution of immigrants for unlawful entry or reentry.\(^3\) Congress should urge the Obama Administration to stop Border Patrol referrals to prosecute unlawful entry or reentry cases. Congress should also tell Attorney General Lynch to halt Operation Streamline because it is inhumane, ineffective, and a waste of taxpayer dollars. International courts have found it to be a violation of human rights and international law. The Office of Inspector General\(^4\) has found that there is no factual evidence to indicate that Operation Streamline is an effective deterrent; rather, it may be in violation of international treaties. This surge of prosecutions has led to over-criminalization and mass incarceration of migrant workers and even asylum seekers, which has cost taxpayers over $5 billion in the last five years at a profit of $90 million each year to the private prison industry.

**All members of Congress should join together and put a stop to the bed quota.** The United States has the largest immigrant detention infrastructure in the world with over 400,000 individuals passing through detention each year. The expansion of the system is in part due to an arbitrary quota from Congress that requires the incarceration of 34,000 immigrants in detention at any given time in private prison facilities.\(^5\) Sixty-two percent of immigration detention beds are operated by private prison companies. This policy, known as the “detention bed quota,” is unprecedented; no other law enforcement agency operates on a quota system. The detention bed quota creates a strong incentive to support and expand mass incarceration, at taxpayers’ expense, while private prison companies earn exorbitant profits at the expense of immigrants’ safety and their lives. We call on all members of Congress to eliminate the detention bed quota and end this perverse practice.

**Congress should pressure Border Patrol to stop the excessive use of force to carry out their duties.** There have been 50 killings from Border Patrol since 2010, and only one agent has been charged. The lack of accountability or effective training to stop excessive use of force by Border Patrol agents has led to an increase in the abuse of immigrants across the country. Recently, the Department of Homeland Security integrity advisory panel released a report, which highlighted the ways in which Border Patrol ignores or downplays abuses by agents and officers.\(^6\) Abuses range from shootings of unarmed people to the unnecessary escalation of force. U.S. Congress should pressure the Department of Homeland Security to increase effective use of force training, to improve transparency and access to information within Customs and Border Protection, and to ensure Border Patrol agents are held to account for the abuses they commit.

As the United Church of Christ and people of faith, we are committed to defending the rights and dignity of all people. We look to our elected officials to show moral leadership in welcoming the immigrant in our midst. Please consider these concerns as you develop real policy solutions that reform our broken and outdated immigration system.

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Sincerely,

Reverend Lee Albertson, United Church of Christ
Reverend Eileen Altman, First Congregational Church of Palo Alto, UCC
Reverend Luis Alvarenga, Comunidad del Buen Pastor
Reverend Jennifer Amy-Dressler, Pilgrim Congregational UCC
Reverend Sarah Anders, Rockville United Church
Reverend Maritza Angulo de Gonzalez, Manantial de Gracia
Lay Leader Jan Anible, Zion United Church of Christ
Lay Leader Tom Banks, Church of the Holy Trinity UCC
Reverend Dr. Loletta Barrett, First Friends Church, Whittier
Lay Leader Gail Bird, First Congregational Church of Tempe UCC
Lay Leader Mary Ann Blank, American Baptist
Reverend Joanne Buchanan-Brown, Rocky Mountain Conference of the United Church of Christ
Lay Leader Michael Buttram, United Church of Santa Fe
Pastor Judith Campbell, United Church of Christ
Lay Leader Kathie Carpenter, Needham Congregational United Church of Christ
Reverend Annabel B. Clark, Sixth Ave. UCC (member)
Lay Leader Donald Clark, Network for Environmental & Economic Responsibility of United Church of Christ
Reverend Deborah Clugy-Soto, Revolution UCC
Reverend Roger Dart, Justice & Witness Ministry, Chicago Metropolitan Association
Reverend John Deckenback, Central Atlantic Conf United Church of Christ
Reverend Richard Doerrer-Peacock, Scottsdale Congregational UCC
Reverend Anne Dunlap, United Church of Montbello
Pastor Elizabeth Durant, Lake Oswego UCC
Reverend Russell Eidmann-Hicks, Holmdel Community UCC
Pastor Baruja Esther, Archwood Ave UCC
Lay Leader Kaye Exo, Bridgeport United Church of Christ
Reverend Julio Filomeno, Hispanic Evangelical UCC
Reverend Laura Folkwein, UCC of Missoula
Lay Leader Alice Foltz, Wellspring UCC
Reverend Jerrold Foltz, Wellspring United Church of Christ
Faith Leader Ronnie Galvin, Covenant Baptist UCC
Reverend Jose Garcia, Bread for the World
Reverend Gregory Garland, United Church of Broomfield
Reverend Christopher Gilmore, Sixth Avenue United Church of Christ
Lay Leader Janet Gwilym, Plymouth Church UCC's Immigration Ministry Team, Seattle, WA
Lay Leader Diane Haines, Minnesota Conference Immigration Team Chair
Lay Leader Karl Hallsten, Journey UCC--Sierra Vista AZ in formation
Faith Leader Gregory Halzen, Nazarene Congregational UCC
Lay Leader Dawn Hammond, 32 Railroad St Holliston MA 01746
Reverend Janet Hansen, Christ Community Church
Lay Leader Karen Hatlestad, Mayflower UCC
Reverend Dale Hempen, Retired
Lay Leader Holly Herman, Southwest Conference UCC
Reverend Malcolm Himschoot, United Church of Christ
Reverend Judith Holcomb, Good Shepherd UCC
Reverend Joyce Hollyday, Circle of Mercy
Reverend Anne Holmes, Little River UCC
Lay Leader Sharon Hunter-Smith, University Church Chicago
Lay Leader Eric Paul Jacobsen, Cherokee Park United Church
Lay Leader Julio Jimenez, United Church of Rockville Centre
Reverend Sylvander Joanne, Cherokee Park United Church
Pastor Steve Johnsen, Retired, Denver Inner City Parish
Reverend Blotz Joseph, First Church of Christ in Mansfield UCC
Michael Kanarek, Trinity United Church, Warren NJ
Lay Leader Miriam Kennedy, United Church of Christ
Lay Leader Ruth Killough-Hill, First Church of Amherst, UCC
Faith Leader Kay King, United Church of Byron UCC
Lay Leader Roberta Kuhn, UCC First Congregational, River Falls, WI
Lay Leader Martha Lammers, Pleasant Hill Community Church
Lay Leader Gail Landers, New Covenant UCC
Lay Leader Phillip Landers, New Covenant United Church of Christ
Reverend Leslie Leasure, Ignite Institute
Lay Leader Lorence Long, First Congregational United Church of Christ
Lay Leader Norma Lopez, First Congregational Church of Chicago
Reverend Mark Lukens, Bethany Congregational Church
Lay Leader Judith Mackenzie, Plymouth Congregational Church, Minneapolis, MN
Reverend Beth Mandelbaum, Park Avenue Christian Church
Pastor Lilton Marks, Fellowship UCC
Lay Leader Stanley Maticka, Immanuel Congregational Church
Lay Leader Janet Matthews, United Church of Rockville Centre
Lay Leader Steve McArthur, University Congregational UCC
Reverend Joellynn Monahan, Heart of Wisdom Monastery
Reverend Jennifer Morgan, Highlands Church Denver
Reverend Leslie Moughty, First Congregational United Church of Christ of Brainerd
Reverend Elizabeth Nash, Congregational Church of Austin
Reverend Drew Nettinga, United Church of Christ
Reverend John T Norris, Washington Park United Church of Christ
Pastor Roberto Ochoa, Lake View Congregational Church - UCC
Reverend Carolyn Olney, Pasadena First Congregational Church
Lay Leader Becky Overmyer-Velazquez, Whittier First Friends Church
Lay Leader Nancy Pape, NH Conference UCC Immigration Working Group
Lay Leader Jean Perkins, Phippsburg UCC
Faith Leader Amy Petre-Hill, Mountain View United Church
Reverend Paul and Mary Margaret Pruitt, Fauntleroy Church, UCC
Reverend Rhina Ramos, Ministerio Latino
Reverend Sheri Randolph, First Congregational UCC
Reverend Herbert Reed, Union in Tavares, FL
Lay Leader Michael Rich, Park Avenue Congregational Church UCC, Arlington, MA
Reverend Persida Rivera-Mendez, Ministerio Nueva Creacion
Reverend T. Michael Rock, Robbinsdale United Church of Christ
Reverend Nancy Rosas, Washington Park UCC
Lay Leader Dallas Rychener, Silver City United Church of Christ
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Pastor Dale Sattizahn, Lower Saucon, Hellertown
Pastor Sally Scheib, Bethel, United Church of Christ
Lay Leader Ralph Schultz, First Congregational UCC, Waukesha, WI
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Reverend Marvin Silver, Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ
Lay Leader Robert Simmons, Bethany UCC
Reverend David Snyder, Community Church
Reverend Jerald Stinson, Senior Minister Emeritus, First Congregational Church of Long Beach, CA

Lay Leader Xzana Tellis, UCCSV/Germantown, MD

Reverend Peter Terpenning, Community United Church of Christ

Reverend Mary Thiel, UCC

Reverend Maren Tirabassi, Madbury United Church of Christ

Reverend Corbin Tobey-Davis, Parkview UCC

Reverend Alex Vishio, Central Atlantic Conference

Reverend John Ward-Diorio, St. Paul's United Church of Christ

Reverend Tara Wilkins, Bridgeport United Church of Christ

Reverend Angela Wright, Greater Birmingham Ministries

Reverend Greg Wright, Plymouth Congregational UCC

Pastor N. Shantia Wright-Gray, United Church of Christ, retired

Reverend Jonathan Wright-Gray, First Church in Sterling, retired

Reverend Esther Ziegler, Evangelical Reformed UCC