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Advocates Demand Thoughtful and Humane Solution

Urging Senators to reject efforts to end asylum

Washington, DC – The newly introduced Senate funding bill, if passed, will result in more cruelty and chaos at our nation’s border. The bill is poisoned with extreme anti-immigrant policies that would essentially end access to asylum, a legal pathway for people fleeing persecution. An international aid bill is no place for immigration reform. It is unconscionable to use people seeking asylum as political pawns to gain support for the protection of others.

The #WelcomeWithDignity Campaign for asylum rights strongly condemns the Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024, introduced by Senators Lankford (R-OK), Sinema (I-AZ), and Murphy (D-CT). Among its most damaging provisions, the bill would make it harder to determine whether a person can apply for asylum, allow individuals and families seeking safety to be deported without a fair day in court, and under certain scenarios, deny anyone the opportunity to seek asylum. These proposals will undermine due process and violate international law. They will also fail to decrease the number of people arriving at the border. Deterrence tactics will not and have never worked.

The latest legislation introduced in the Senate fails to provide practical solutions to the humanitarian needs at the U.S. border. We stand firm that addressing global displacement needs, including at the U.S. border, require thoughtful and humane solutions. These solutions include investing in resources to increase processing capacity at the border, increasing funding to communities and organizations that welcome arriving people, creating additional legal pathways for people to seek safety, and addressing the backlog in asylum and work permit applications.

The #WelcomeWithDignity Campaign strongly urges the Senate to reject this bill. We are grateful to the members of Congress who have expressed grave concerns about the inclusion of [provisions that would harm the asylum system](#) in a spending bill, including the [Congressional Progressive Caucus](#), [Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus](#) and the [Congressional Hispanic Caucus](#).

“Over the years, the U.S. has ramped up its cruelty in an attempt to curtail the number of people arriving at its border. Adults and children have been put in cages, families have been separated, the border has been closed and, still, people continue to seek safety. People flee their home countries out of necessity. This bill will not stop people from coming; it will only lead to more cruelty and chaos at the border,” said **Melina Roche, #WelcomeWithDignity Campaign Manager.** “As

a nation, we must remember and embrace our shared humanity and reject extreme anti-immigrant sentiments that punish people for seeking safety. We must save asylum.”

Partner Quotes:

“The rights of people seeking asylum must be protected, not traded away like political bargaining chips,” said **Blaine Bookey, Legal Director of the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS)**.

“While the White House has touted this deal as a ‘tough’ move to address challenges at our southern border, anyone who has been paying attention to asylum policy in recent years sees it for what it is: a shameful attempt at political posturing that treats refugees’ lives as expendable. The government has tried these ‘tough’ policies before. They were an abject failure by every metric, only creating chaos, dysfunction, and profound human suffering at our nation’s doorstep. If this bill passes, it will mark a complete abdication of the United States’ legal and moral commitments to refugees and a stunning betrayal of President Biden’s promise to restore our ‘historic role as a safe haven’ for those escaping persecution.”

“We can now read the text of the extreme Republican Trojan Horse border bill, one that when wheeled into Congress invites acceptance by claiming to be a bi-partisan offering of a panacea for real comprehensive immigration reform. In reality, in its true shape and form, it is a bill designed with clear intent to eviscerate our asylum system and replace it with a carceral and deterrence structure of maximal force,” said **Thomas Cartwright, leadership team at Witness at the Border**.

“This bill provides no solutions to our outmoded immigration system. It will instead create confusion and chaos at the border and inflict immeasurable harm on those fleeing to us for protection, and to the moral fabric of this country that used to stand as an example of fairness and compassion. We urge the White House to stand down and Democratic Senators to see this Trojan Horse bill for what it is – a ploy to invert your humanitarian beliefs for the promise of an illusion of a remedy.”

Priscilla Orta, Supervising Director of Project Corazon at Lawyers for Good Government, states, “Removing judicial review and the ability to appeal from asylum decisions is a grave violation of due process rights for a proceeding that has the highest possible stakes - life or death. This is just one of many threats to the fundamental principles of human rights present in the Senate supplemental funding bill, which will certainly disproportionately endanger the lives of Black, Indigenous, LGBTQI+, women, and children asylum seekers. These measures are not about enhancing border security but about closing our doors to those in dire need of sanctuary.”

Estuardo Cifuentes, a Guatemalan Asylum Seeker and Client Manager of Lawyers for Good Government’s Project Corazon, further emphasizes, “The proposed legislation is a step in the wrong direction and instead marks a disturbing escalation beyond even what we saw under the Trump Administration. We must remember these policies will impact real people fleeing persecution and danger, people in extremely vulnerable conditions who have stories, dreams, and the fundamental right to seeking safety. As a nation, we have the power and responsibility to offer

more than just shelter. Any immigration reform should align with our deepest values and our long-term commitment to justice and humanity”

Arash Azizzada, co-director for Afghans For A Better Tomorrow: “The Trump-style deal announced yesterday is a cynical attempt to use Afghan evacuees as a political bargaining chip, trading away a precious lifeline that Afghans left behind have used to seek safety and asylum on our border. We cannot in good conscience accept a toxic deal that destroys these life-saving protections and pits one group of Afghans against another as well as others seeking asylum.”

“While bipartisanship requires political compromise, it does not require compromising our nation’s core values,” **said Krish O’Mara Vignarajah, President and CEO of Global Refuge.** “Migration poses a complex challenge, but without robust humanitarian exceptions, summary expulsions risk violating international law enacted precisely to safeguard against the refoulement of vulnerable people back to danger. Similarly, moving the goalposts on initial asylum eligibility would ultimately deny protection to persecuted individuals and families based on increasingly arbitrary factors, and not on the merits of their claim. Building additional legal pathways should be the cornerstone of any effort to alleviate strain on the border, and should have been a more pronounced priority in these negotiations.”

“While we recognize that there are undeniable challenges at our southern border, this so-called Senate deal would do nothing to alleviate that pressure and would undermine asylum protections for people fleeing for their lives,” **said HIAS President and CEO Mark Hetfield.** “The United States needs to stop trying to patch up our broken immigration and asylum system, and instead enact comprehensive immigration reform. The Senate bill would undermine U.S. asylum law, endangering people attempting to seek protection in this country during an unprecedented global displacement crisis. Instead of making our nation safer and leading by the power of our example, this bill would make it almost impossible for people to access asylum, while at the same time creating uncertainty and chaos.”

"If this bill becomes law, it spells out a scary future—more families torn apart, more innocent children confined, and more individuals forcibly returned to the brutal realities of persecution, torture, and potential death," **said Fatima Saidi, Director of We Are All America.** "Our laws should always and consistently prioritize human lives and human dignity. The rights of those seeking asylum should be safeguarded, not treated as pawns in political negotiations, and we shouldn't give in to the political spectacle of turning people away. Every person deserves a reliable chance to present their case, regardless of where they stand in the queue. For the past four decades, we have witnessed that relying on deterrence and enforcement to bring order to the border is futile, and this doomed package is set to continue that pattern of failure."

"This bill reflects a decision to engage in harmful, illegal, and short-sighted political gambling with human lives rather than an earnest attempt to rebuild U.S. immigration policy. People move, especially when faced with danger. And, if the U.S. prioritized safe, orderly, and fair pathways to migration rather than political gamesmanship, we would be a stronger nation," **said Robin Phillips, Executive Director of The Advocates for Human Rights.** "Let's be clear: the provisions as proposed will put the U.S. in violation of international law. Punishing people for seeking safety is precisely what gave rise to the Refugee Convention, and these political maneuvers risk repeating those costly mistakes."

“NETWORK decries the new harsh policies of expulsion and exclusion of people seeking safety in the U.S. that are included in the Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2024,” **said Mary Novak, Executive Director for NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice.** The Catholic tradition honors international law that provides human beings the right to seek asylum, and we believe countries have a moral

responsibility to care for those seeking help at their borders. This dangerous bill will only lead to more human suffering, especially among Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.”

“As an organization present at the U.S.-Mexico border, we express deep concern over how this bill could further complicate the situation at the border for those seeking safety,” said **Joan Rosenhauer, President of Jesuit Refugee Service/USA**. “Overall, we support solutions that provide access to asylum and ensure the well-being and safety of those arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border. While this bill misses the mark, we encourage Congress to continue these bipartisan efforts and work towards comprehensive solutions that guarantee access to asylum in a fair, safe, and orderly way.”

“Attempts to expand non-detained preliminary fear screenings while curtailing due process protections must be rejected—any process in which life or death decisions are being made must, at a bare minimum, provide an opportunity for judicial review,” said **Shalyn Fluharty, Executive Director of Americans for Immigrant Justice**. “While the proposed legislation does include some welcome provisions, such as appointed legal counsel for unaccompanied children and individuals deemed unable to represent themselves, and numerous provisions in relation to expanding access to legal permanent residence status to certain groups, including our Afghan Allies—these sweeteners cannot cure a sour deal. We must safeguard protections for all people seeking safety and opportunity in the United States, not just a select few.”

“We are witnessing an unprecedented crisis of global displacement and insecurity that requires a comprehensive approach aimed at addressing the root causes of migration, increasing and streamlining lawful pathways for migration and strengthening our strained U.S. asylum system,” said **Cindy Woods, National Policy Counsel at Americans for Immigrant Justice**. “The changes to asylum and border processing included in the supplemental funding bill would do nothing more than sow havoc at the Southern Border, return vulnerable individuals back into harm’s way, and fundamentally deny due process to asylum seekers in the United States.”

“Immigration is not just an issue or campaign tactic—it’s fundamentally about people and what they need and how we as a nation treat them,” said **Karen Tumlin, Founder and Director of Justice Action Center**. “Those of us who have worked with asylum seekers know that our communities are enriched by their presence. The process by which this bill has come about puts politics over people. We’ve seen these tactics used before, and lived experience should teach us that the proposed border ‘deterrence’ measures are not only ineffective, but counterproductive to achieving the reforms and modernized processes we need. They will not stop people fleeing for their lives from seeking safety.”

“What we see cannot be called a compromise. These recycled, cruel, and ineffective deterrence-based policies have no place in any modern-day, good-faith immigration reform effort,” said **Casey Carter Swegman, Director of Public Policy at the Tahirih Justice Center**. “We already know the impact these harmful policy proposals will have. They will gut the asylum system and effectively slam the door in the face of immigrant survivors fleeing gender-based violence seeking to exercise their right to apply for asylum in the U.S. Not only are these policies destined to fail to address the challenges along our border, the harm they will cause will land disproportionately on already marginalized immigrant survivors of color. This deal is a betrayal of our ideals and we demand that this Administration and the Senate do better. Nothing is worth trading away the lives and safety of immigrant survivors.”

“We are outraged that the Senate is advancing such harmful, anti-immigrant legislation,” said **Sirine Shebaya, Executive Director of the National Immigration Project**. “Last week, the House of Representatives showed its willingness to scapegoat and demonize immigrant communities through its passage of four anti-immigrant bills, and this week, Senate leaders have decided to sell out immigrant communities in exchange for foreign aid. The proposals in this Senate bill would subject people to expulsion without due process, expand this

country's inhumane detention apparatus, and exacerbate human rights abuses at the border. This bill would lead to tragedy and loss of life and would eviscerate our most dearly-held values. It does not offer any real solutions - it would only exacerbate the same 'border crisis' while causing even more human suffering. As a nationwide membership organization, the National Immigration Project is committed to working hand in hand with its partners and members across the country to continue demanding that Congress and the Biden administration reject these harmful anti-immigrant frameworks and instead take bold action to implement policies that create a more just and humane immigration system."

"Trading away human life, safety, and dignity is not a compromise, it is a moral and humanitarian failure that cuts away at our proclaimed values as a country and society," said **Sue Roche, Executive Director at the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (ILAP)** in Maine. "ILAP stands with asylum seekers and the right to seek asylum and calls on lawmakers to reject the proposed Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2024. Language in the bill about asylum flies in the face of international law and would strip away due process for incredibly vulnerable people, permitting rapid expulsions that will inevitably strand people in Mexico and leave them in peril, among other dangerous provisions. We can and must build a just and welcoming asylum system and lawmakers should come to the table with strategies that improve access and preserve and expand human and legal rights - using people fleeing for their lives as political fodder is unacceptable."

"Compassion and human rights must guide our treatment of those seeking refuge and a better life for their families. The Senate's proposal is filled with callousness, militarism, and political gamesmanship. If passed, this dangerous, white supremacist agenda will weaken our asylum system, ramp up deportations, deny asylum seekers due process, and put people's lives at risk. We urge our leaders to align with dignity, let our values guide our policy, and enact a transformative immigration program that provides permanent protections for undocumented families, expedites work permits for newly arrived migrants, and increases funding to those welcoming migrants with dignity," said **Matt Nelson, Executive Director of Presente.org**.

"As an organization that assists and accompanies people fleeing violence and persecution and desperately seeking protection in the U.S., we are concerned that the restrictive proposals will cause further harm and create chaos at the border. Under the current bill, access to safety will become a game of chance and luck, which is inhumane and unfair and contradicts the values by which this great nation stands," said **Joanna Williams, Executive Director of the Kino Border Initiative**. "The Senators don't have a practical, on the ground understanding of these issues and do not seem to realize that further tightening access to asylum at the border only benefits organized crime, who exploit the lack of legal pathways for their benefit and who profit from people's desperation and need. As such, we oppose the current proposal unless it is significantly revised to be realigned with humanity and common sense."

"We are in a period of historic migration worldwide. It's not just the United States: many countries throughout the hemisphere are receiving hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers," said **Maureen Meyer, Vice President for Programs at the Washington Office on Latin America**. "This is a moment when the United States should be leading its regional neighbors on a humanitarian response, building up its broken asylum system, and investing in processing and due process guarantees. Instead, this bill's provisions include a historic partial dismantlement of the right to seek asylum at the U.S. border. This is a step in the wrong direction whose impact will reverberate throughout the Americas. It goes against U.S. commitments under the Refugee Convention, it will place many people directly in harm's way, and—as the Title 42 experience showed us—it won't reduce or deter migration at the U.S.-Mexico border."

"This bill is a disgrace, plain and simple," said **Laura St. John, Florence Project Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project Legal Director**. "It embraces extreme restrictions on asylum and policies that will cause immense human suffering at the border and for all seeking protection in the United States."

Despite President Biden's campaign promises to restore humanity to our immigration system, instead he is supporting and in fact encouraging policies that will lead to families being separated, will put the lives of people seeking protection in grave danger, and create the very conditions of confusion and instability in which cartels and transnational criminal organizations thrive."

"The cruelty at the border needs to stop," said **Dylan Corbett, executive director of the Hope Border Institute**. "The provisions outlined in the appropriations bill, purporting to automatically shut down the border and expel individuals seeking safety, are a catalyst for increased chaos on both the US and Mexican sides. Any policy that fails to acknowledge the complex realities of migration and prioritizes enforcement over compassion is fundamentally flawed; failing to do so will result in deaths, extortion, and kidnappings across the US-Mexico border. We call on policymakers to reject these harmful provisions and instead work towards comprehensive solutions that honor our nation's commitment to human dignity and justice."

The #WelcomeWithDignity Campaign for asylum rights is composed of more than 100 organizations committed to transforming the way the United States receives and protects people forced to flee their homes to ensure they are treated humanely and fairly. To learn more and join our campaign visit: welcomewithdignity.org

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