Protect the Human and Civil Rights of Migrants and U.S. Citizens held in U.S. Customs and Border Protection Custody

June 16, 2013

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510


Dear Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader McConnell and Senators:

We strongly urge you to support an amendment to S.744, the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013 which would create protections for U.S. Citizens and others held in U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) custody. Senator Boxer has introduced Amendment #1260 which would require the Department of Homeland Security to promulgate regulations regarding standards in CBP custody. These regulations would cover basic humane treatment such as the provision of food, emergency medical care, translated legal documents, timely transfers and access to facilities by non-governmental organizations.

In recent years, CBP has routinely violated its own policies and committed grave civil and human rights abuses against both migrants and U.S. Citizens held in CBP facilities. These abuses include verbal abuse, denial of medical care, inadequate food and water, exposure to extreme temperatures causing physical harm to detainees, bright lights 24 hours per day making it impossible to sleep, overcrowding and permanent confiscation of important personal items including legal documents, medication and personal identification.

Detainees are often encouraged to sign documents written only in English which are neither translated nor explained to them. These documents are orders for expedited removal which mean that immigrants can be immediately deported without a chance to apply for asylum or other means of staying in the country. In fact, many legitimate asylum seekers who have already endured violence and trauma and come to the United States to seek safety, have unknowingly signed these orders.

We are a diverse group of faith, civil rights and human rights organizations who believe this is a human rights issue which must be addressed. Our groups are not alone: in a recent poll of registered voters, over 90% of respondents—regardless of party affiliation—said they support creating “greater oversight and accountability” of CBP. This straightforward amendment would help to achieve this oversight.

We strongly urge you to support Senator Boxer’s amendment (#1260) requiring the Department of Homeland Security to promulgate regulations establishing short-term custody standards providing for the basic minimum care at all CBP facilities holding individuals in custody.

Sincerely,

Americans for Immigrant Justice
Alliance San Diego
American Civil Liberties Union
Amnesty International USA
Annunciation House
Asian American Justice Center, member of Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
Asociacion de Liderazgo Comunitaro
Border Network for Human Rights
Boston University Civil Litigation Program\Immigrants' Rights Clinic
California Immigrant Policy Center
Center for Advocacy, Rights and Engagement
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Champaign Urbana, Immigration Forum
Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM)
Detention Work Network
El Grupo
Employee Rights Center
Families for Freedom
Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights
Human Rights Initiative of North Texas
Human Rights First
Immigration Equality Action Fund
Institute for Women in Migration (Mexico City, Mexico)
Interfaith Coalition on Immigration (ICOM, MN)
Islamic Center of San Diego
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
Jesuit Social Research Institute/Loyola University New Orleans
Kids in Need of Defense
Kino Border Initiative
Latin America Working Group
La Union del Pueblo Entero
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Immigration Forum
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center
New Mexico Voices for Children
No More Deaths
Office of Immigration Issues for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Political Asylum/ Immigration Representation Project
Reformed Church of Highland Park, NJ
San Diego LGBT Community Center
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
South Asian Network
South Texas Civil Rights Project of Alamo
Unitarian Universalist Refugee and Immigrant Services (UURISE)
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
U.S. Jesuit Conference
United Taxi Workers of San Diego
Women's Refugee Commission