



JEWISH COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL
of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin, Sonoma, Alameda and Contra Costa Counties

JCRC Guidelines on Immigration Issues

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Unanimously approved by the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco, the Peninsula and Marin Counties

The American Jewish community has long supported a liberal immigration policy, both because of modern Jewish historical imperatives and because the pluralistic nature of American society, which is rooted in our immigrant tradition, is good for the Jews.

Now, with immigration once again heating up as a major issue and enormous population pressures facing this country and the world at large, the Jewish community has a significant stake in the debate. Among the issues of particular importance to the Jewish community are the following:

- definition of refugee status, and availability of refugee slots;
- intergroup tensions that arise from immigration-connected issues
- scapegoating of immigrants/increase in racism
- commitment of new immigrants to democratic values
- possible erosion of civil liberties protection for immigrants
- competition for limited public resources.

In light of these concerns, the Jewish Community Relations Council endorses the following principles and will analyze immigration reform proposals with them in mind:

1. **A liberal American immigration policy, particularly with respect to family reunification and acceptance of refugees fleeing persecution, is fundamental to our nation's commitment to pluralism and its immigrant roots.**

We oppose any efforts to reduce legal immigration from current levels or to reduce access for legitimate refugees as defined in international law.¹

We will continue to support immigration based on family reunification and specialized skills.

- 2. The U.S. federal government should continue to support a partnership of the public and private sectors in absorbing refugees, and should reduce the disproportionate costs of absorbing immigrants that is placed on certain state and local governments.**

We support full funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement as well as undiminished funding for social services for refugees.

We also support equitable cost-sharing between the federal government and those states and cities that are assuming the lion's share of the economic cost of absorbing new immigrants.

- 3. Proposals or statements that have the intent or effect of exaggerating the significance of immigrants as the source of this country's or states economic difficulties should be rejected.**

We will closely monitor public officials' statements and proposals, media portrayal of the issue, and anti-immigration activities in the community for any scapegoating and will attempt to counter such efforts lest they foster racism or bigotry.

- 4. Expedited asylum procedures must not eliminate the right of streamlined judicial review for asylum seekers.**

We support the principle of expedited asylum procedures that protect the integrity of the asylum process and address public concerns about asylum abuse. Increased resources are urgently needed to reduce the backlog of asylum applicants and procedures must be reformed to ensure swift adjudication of asylum claims.

We will, however, oppose policies that deny judicial appeal to asylum seekers.

We oppose any effort to automatically exclude asylum seekers just because they do not possess legal documents. Absence of such documentation may, in fact, be an indication of genuine fear of the government one is fleeing.

- 5. The flow of illegal immigrants into this country should be reduced in a humane way.**

We support increased resources aimed at reducing the flow of illegal immigrants into the U.S.

We further support increased enforcement of laws to:

- a. vigorously prosecute and punish smugglers of immigrants;
 - b. keep terrorists and others who pose a threat to our country's well-being out of the United States; and
 - c. deter exploitation of undocumented aliens by employers.
6. **Legislation aimed at reducing social service benefits to illegal immigrants, including in areas of health and education, should be closely monitored to ensure that it does not foster racism and discrimination, nor impinge upon rights of legal residents.**

Specifically, we will oppose legislation that may:

- a. result in singling out people on the basis of color (or some other discriminatory basis) as suspected illegal immigrants;
 - b. contribute to increased racism or discrimination in our country;
 - c. endanger the health, safety or well-being of society (e.g. denying treatment to illegal immigrants with communicable diseases or to their children);
 - d. diminish the rights and benefits of legal immigrants.
7. **Educational programs aimed at fostering tolerance of new immigrant populations, increasing understanding of the role of immigration in American history, and separating myth from reality regarding the impact of immigration on jobs and social services, should be encouraged; and immigrant education programs should be strengthened with democratic values woven into their curriculum.**

The organized Jewish community will support coalitional efforts aimed at ensuring that schools, the media, public officials and community influentials address the dangers of any anti-immigrant backlash and acknowledge the positive contributions that continue to be made by America's newest immigrant groups.

Notes

1. The United Nations Protocol on Refugees establishes a definition of refugee based on a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. The United States ratified the Protocol in 1968 and implemented these standards through the Refugee Act of 1980.

