

LALDEF STATEMENT ON PRESIDENT OBAMA'S IMMIGRATION ACCOUNTABILITY EXECUTIVE ORDERS

A few days ago, President Barack Obama issued an executive order that will offer relief to nearly five million unauthorized immigrants living in the U.S. It will expand the number of those eligible under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and also benefit high-skilled immigrants and their close relatives. Those who have lived in the country five years or longer, those who have American-born children, and those who register and pay the necessary taxes and fines will be exempted from deportation.

LALDEF heartily welcomes the president's executive order which addresses the suffering of throngs languishing in the shadows. We recognize this as a sign of courage and clear willingness to voice the anguish of Hispanics—citizens as well as immigrants. We commend Obama for his patience and measured use of prosecutorial discretion in a matter of paramount ethical and social import. We stand ready to support him in light of strong reaction from those who oppose immigration reform.

We also recognize the executive order as a limited first step and echo the president's call for comprehensive reform. A sensible bill to refurbish our broken system was passed by the U.S. Senate in 2013. It withers in the House of Representatives where it would be passed if only it were put up for a vote. Partisan interests and repugnant ideologies, not consistent with our nation's values, have prevented public officials from moving forward on a law that would benefit immigrants, businesses, and the society at large. LALDEF stands firmly on the side of those calling for further action to implement a rational and fair immigration policy.

Most unauthorized immigrants are not felons—they are individuals committed to American values of hard work, adherence to the law, and devotion to family. They arrived in this country seeking opportunity but obsolete rules prevent them from joining the mainstream. They live in terror, unable to climb the opportunity ladder. They labor under difficult conditions, lending services and creating goods that we take for granted—picking our vegetables, cleaning our homes, caring for our children, and building our houses. Children brought into this country by undocumented parents have grown up as Americans in every way but, because they lack legal standing, they can't even obtain drivers' licenses. Such inequities are affronts we must denounce.

The president's executive order is but a temporary measure that still leaves six million people forgotten and still hiding. Even as we salute the president's gallant action, we condemn those who stand in the way of progress. The deficiencies of the current immigration system are in flagrant violation of America's tradition of tolerance and justice. With the president we exhort Congress to "pass a bill!" Only then will the mission be accomplished.