

Statement of the National Immigration Law Center

Senate Judiciary Committee

Hearing on Comprehensive Reform Legislation

April 19, 2013

The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) is a nonpartisan organization exclusively dedicated to defending and advancing the rights of low-income immigrants and their families. We conduct policy analysis, advocacy, and impact litigation, as well as provide training, publications, and technical assistance for a broad range of groups throughout the U.S.

NILC is pleased to submit this statement to the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary for the April 19, 2013 hearing entitled on S. 744, the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act. We applaud the Committee for conducting this important hearing. Since 1979, NILC has defended the fundamental and constitutional rights of all Americans through impact litigation. Many of our clients are low-income immigrants who have been harmed by our current immigration laws and policies that deny them basic due process protections.

If enacted, S. 744 would represent the largest-scale change to the nation's immigration laws in more than 25 years. The plan includes a road to citizenship for immigrants who have been in the country without authorization since before Dec. 31, 2011, and proposes to reduce visa backlogs for those who have been waiting for years to be reunited with their loved ones.

NILC is very pleased that the sponsors of this legislation delivered on their months-long promise to finally come up with a plan to bring our country's immigration laws in line with our societal needs and economic well-being. This historic proposal would create a road to citizenship for many of the millions of aspiring citizens who have lived and worked in this country for decades. The bill would also lift the specter of deportation from millions more families who face the constant fear that their undocumented loved one is one traffic ticket away from deportation. If enacted, this law would bring our legal reality in line with what we all already know: that the 11 million people living and working in this country without papers are a fundamental part of the fabric of our nation's society.

As with all bipartisan legislation, this bill contains many compromises, some of which may have been made in hopes of strengthening the chances that this legislation would ultimately become law. Unfortunately, many of these compromises threaten the health and stability of immigrants and their U.S. citizen family members by excluding them from our most important health care and social insurance programs or by requiring U.S. employers

to use an electronic employment eligibility verification system that is much more likely to hurt authorized immigrant workers than native-born workers. We should not sacrifice sound public policy at the altar of political expedience.

This bill introduction is merely the first act of what will undoubtedly be a long political play. NILC looks forward to working with members of this Committee to finally bring our immigration laws in line with our values for fairness, equality, and justice. Current and aspiring citizens deserve nothing less, and our country can and must do better than the status quo.