United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 5, 2013

Dear Colleague:

As the 113th Congress begins, the need to enact comprehensive immigration reform has never been more pressing. From top to bottom, our immigration system fails to reflect our national priorities, needs and values. The treatment of workers of all skill levels, a pathway to citizenship for law abiding immigrants already here, maintenance and restoration of family unity, asylum policy, and proper allocation of enforcement resources all deserve attention.

As part of this discussion, we declare our commitment to the passage of a common-sense bill that serves our nation's interests and upholds our Constitution. America is a nation of values, founded on the idea that all people are created equal under God, no matter what they look like or where they came from. Our immigration laws should reflect our commitment to these values. They should be grounded in civil and human rights and ensure due process, equal treatment, and fairness.

When we examine our current immigration enforcement system through the lens of these values, substantial reforms are clearly needed. Current immigration enforcement practices tear families apart and hurt people who know only America as home. More than one in every five people deported are parents of U.S. citizens. Thousands of people, including those seeking asylum, are unnecessarily detained at great expense to taxpayers even though they pose no threat to public safety. Our laws mandate detention or deportation for many people, denying them access to a hearing before a judge, without guaranteeing legal counsel for those who cannot afford it. Immigration enforcement measures frequently target minority and immigrant communities through impermissible racial profiling that instills fear and distrust of law enforcement and makes communities less safe. Our system is not fair. It is unnecessarily punitive and disproportionate.

Our nation has committed substantial resources to immigration enforcement, now reaching $18 billion annually. The smart solutions to our broken immigration system do not require the blind commitment of additional precious resources. The answer lies with enacting immigration reform that is good for our communities, our economy, and our nation.

Today, America is at a crossroads. The question we face is not only how much enforcement we need, but how we will bring our enforcement in line with our nation's values. We renew our commitment to fight for principled immigration reform that does the following:

1. Provides an enforcement process that matches our values. To the greatest extent possible, we should strive for a process that includes a fair hearing before a judge, a bond hearing, federal court review, and access to counsel.

2. Provides for the humane treatment of everyone detained by immigration authorities and ensures that no one is deprived of their liberty except as a last resort.

3. Reduces the impact of enforcement on children and families.

4. Clarifies that immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility and that it should be administered uniformly across the country.

5. Explicitly rejects discrimination and racial profiling.

6. Ensures that all agencies charged with enforcement operate with accountability and transparency.

In this immigration reform effort, we must not lose sight of the imperative to create an immigration system that is worthy of our nation's values and our Constitution.

Sincerely,

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator