

October 17, 2013

Dear Members of Congress:

We, the undersigned Jewish organizations, write to express our opposition to the Strengthen and Fortify Enforcement (SAFE) Act, H.R. 2278, which was approved by the House Judiciary Committee in June. Our views are shaped by our Jewish religious and ethical traditions, as well as our own history in this country and by core American values. The commandment to ‘welcome the stranger’ is mentioned 36 times throughout the Torah, more than any other commandment.

In particular, this legislation would have serious negative consequences for immigrants and refugees by:

- Delegating the enforcement of national immigration laws to state and local law enforcement agencies, which renders immigrant communities, and society as a whole, less safe by undermining trust between law enforcement officers and communities they have sworn to serve and protect;
- Worsening expansive laws targeting terrorism that instead have consequences for refugees and asylees;
- Expanding the immigration detention system that currently holds many torture survivors, asylum seekers, and other seeking protection in the U.S. from persecution in their home countries;
- Requiring the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to complete background and security checks before granting immigrant or non-immigrant applications, including work permits, which would impact individuals for whom such checks are grossly delayed beyond their control and who are ultimately cleared;
- Eliminating current prohibitions on indefinite detention of individuals for immigration purposes, including torture survivors and stateless individuals who cannot obtain travel documents;
- Criminalizing assistance to vulnerable migrants by community volunteers and religious ministries, who would face fines for “transporting, moving, harboring or shielding” a refugee or asylum seeker who may have fallen out of status.

Furthermore, the SAFE Act would authorize dramatic increases in spending at a time when spending on immigration enforcement is at an all-time high. It would add millions more to the nearly \$18 billion American spend annually on a failed strategy.

American Jews know too well the impact of restrictive immigration policies, and we have seen how the immigration issue can become a flashpoint for xenophobia. This type of legislation undermines our nation’s legal obligations to refugees and would cause unnecessary hardship for those who seek and those who have already proved they are legitimate refugees and have received protection in the U.S.

We urge you to oppose passage of the SAFE Act and any other legislation that obstructs our Jewish and American values of welcoming the stranger.

Sincerely,

***National Organizations:***

American Jewish Committee

Anti-Defamation League

Association of Jewish Family and Children’s Agencies

B’nai B’rith International

HIAS

Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
Jewish Federations of North America  
National Council of Jewish Women  
Union for Reform Judaism

***Local Organizations:***

AJC Chicago  
AJC Cincinnati  
AJC Houston  
AJC Los Angeles  
AJC Miami and Broward  
AJC NY  
AJC Palm Beach County  
AJC Westchester  
Community Relations Council of the Jewish Alliance of Greater Rhode Island  
Greater Philadelphia Jewish Coalition on Immigration  
Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Service (Clearwater, FL)  
HIAS Pennsylvania  
Jewish Community Action (St. Paul, MN)  
Jewish Community Relations Council of New Haven  
Jewish Community Relations Council of Southern New Jersey  
Jewish Council for Urban Affairs (Chicago, IL)  
Jewish Family Service of San Diego  
Jewish Family Service – Seattle  
Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley  
Jewish Labor Committee Western Region  
Jews United for Justice (Washington, DC)  
National Council of Jewish Women Texas State Policy Advocacy Network  
National Council of Jewish Women Florida State Public Advocacy Committee