



**BOARD OF DIRECTORS
REGULAR MEMBERS**

Jose H. Gomez

ARCHBISHOP OF SAN ANTONIO

Daniel N. DiNardo

**ARCHBISHOP OF GALVESTON-
HOUSTON**

Gregory M. Aymond

BISHOP OF AUSTIN

Edmond Carmody

BISHOP OF CORPUS CHRISTI

Alvaro Corrada del Rio, S.J.

BISHOP OF TYLER

David E. Fellhauer

BISHOP OF VICTORIA

Charles V. Grahmann

BISHOP OF DALLAS

Curtis J. Guillory, S.V.D.

BISHOP OF BEAUMONT

Armando X. Ochoa

BISHOP OF EL PASO

Raymundo J. Peña

BISHOP OF BROWNSVILLE

Michael D. Pfeifer, O.M.I.

BISHOP OF SAN ANGELO

Placido Rodriguez, C.M.F.

BISHOP OF LUBBOCK

James A. Tamayo

BISHOP OF LAREDO

Kevin W. Vann

BISHOP OF FORT WORTH

John W. Yanta

BISHOP OF AMARILLO

CONSULTATIVE MEMBERS

ALL OTHER TEXAS BISHOPS

**Testimony of Bishop James Tamayo, Bishop of Laredo, Texas
Joint Hearing of State Affairs and Border & International Affairs
80th Texas Legislature
March 28, 2007**

My name is Bishop James Tamayo and I am testifying today on behalf of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Texas.

The Catholic Church has a long history of involvement in the immigration issue, both in the advocacy arena and in welcoming and assimilating waves of immigrants and refugees who have helped build our nation throughout her history. Many Catholic immigration programs were involved in the implementation of the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986 and continue to work with immigrants today. We have a strong working relationship with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). There are currently immigration legal assistance service programs including refugee resettlement programs and shelters for victims of human trafficking and unaccompanied minors throughout Texas under the auspices of Catholic Charities and the Roman Catholic dioceses.

Our experience in working with immigrants throughout the years compels us to speak out on the issue of immigration reform, which we believe is a moral issue which impacts the human rights and human life of the person. The Church's work in assisting migrants stems from the belief that every person is created in God's image. In the Old Testament, God calls upon his people to care for the alien because of their own alien experience; "So, you, too, must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:17-19). In the New Testament, the image of the migrants is grounded in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In his own life and work, Jesus identified himself with newcomers and with other marginalized persons in a special way; "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt. 25:35). Jesus, as an infant, found himself as a refugee fleeing the terror of Herod (Mt. 2:15), and as an adult, Jesus was an itinerant preacher without a home of his own.

In the pastoral letter *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, the bishops of the United States of America and the bishops of the Republic of Mexico emphasize why we speak on the migration issue: "As pastors, we witness the consequences of a failed system every day in the eyes of migrants who come to our parish doors in search of assistance. We are shepherds to communities, both along the border and in the interior of the nation, which are impacted by immigration. Most tragically, we witness the loss of life at points along our southern border when migrants, desperate to find employment to support themselves and their families, perish in the desert."

As the Bishop of a diocese on the border between Mexico and the United States, I bring the experience of living side by side as a neighbor with Mexico. We who live along the border see our southern neighbors as allies and partners. For many U. S. citizens, they are also members of our family. While we respect the sovereignty of Mexico and the United States, our lived experience is one of a supportive community. People work, shop, eat and attend private schools on both sides of the border. It is a relationship of mutual respect and understanding.

-more-

Testimony of Bishop Tamayo—2

For these reasons, the Catholic Church in Texas holds a strong interest in the welfare of immigrants and how our nation and indeed our state welcomes newcomers from all lands. We respect the federal role of protecting the borders of the United States and regulating the flow of immigrants. However, the current immigration system, which can lead to family separation, suffering, and even death, is morally unacceptable and *must be reformed at the federal level*.

Contributions to Society and Denial of Public Health and Public Education

There are several bills before your committees that would deny public health and public education to immigrant families, including the citizen born children of undocumented immigrants. We reject all such bills as harmful as they deny basic rights to residents in our state in addition to being contrary to the common good. The future of Texas depends on a healthy, educated workforce.

Let me say that the Church does not condone or encourage illegal immigration because it is not good for society or for the migrant, who lives outside the law and in the shadows. We look to the federal government to change our laws to reflect the reality of migration in the world today and to ensure that basic human rights and dignity are respected. Yes, those in the United States without legal status have broken the law, but they do so in order to survive and to support their families. At the same time, they contribute to our economy through their hard work and work in important industries. So we must consider if the law is a just one and whether it is in the best interest of the nation to change the law.

Our state tax structure is based on fees, sales, and property taxes, all of which are paid by all residents in Texas, regardless of immigration status. The simple truth is that the undocumented already contribute a great deal to our state in terms of the property taxes they pay through rents and the sales taxes they pay every time they buy goods and services, and this is in addition to the work they perform.

State and Local Enforcement of Federal Law

There are multiple bills before you that would grant broad authorization to state and local law enforcement authorities to enforce federal immigration laws. We reject the premise that all persons suspected of being undocumented immigrants should be rounded up by state and local police agents. State and local law enforcement authorities have many serious concerns on their hands, such as protecting our communities from those who seek to harm others. If these provisions are enacted into law, we fear that immigrant communities would no longer trust local police to protect them or to share with them important information about crime in their neighborhoods. We also are fearful that massive-scale enforcement of civil immigration laws by improperly trained state and local police officials will result in inadvertent deprivations of even citizens' and lawful permanent residents' civil and constitutional rights. Instead of criminalizing these persons, we should permit those who are here to earn a legal status so they can come forward and contribute to our nation without fear.

The church supports the right of the sovereign nation to control its borders. That is not the issue here. The issue is that the immigration system, which includes enforcement, is flawed and needs repair. We need a new approach. We believe that it is the proper role of the federal government to reform the legal immigration system.

-more-

Policy Recommendations

At this point in my testimony I believe it would be helpful if I offered up a few recommendations based on both a moral framework and our experience serving immigrants in Texas. I believe that these Committees should:

1. Reject all bills which shift the federal obligation to enforce immigration laws to the local and state levels, including bills which punish cities for community policing strategies and support of day labor sites. (HB 13; HB 700; HB 855; HB 858; HB 904; HB 905; HB 907; HB 931; HB 932; HB 1012; HB 1256; HB 1274; HB 1727; HB 1774; HB 2180; HB 2998; HB 3020; HB 3704)
2. Reject all bills which deny basic public health and education to undocumented immigrants or deny exemplary damages, humanitarian and legal assistance to non-citizens. (HB 28; HB 906; HB 1053)
3. Reject all bills which unfairly target immigrant workers with new fees for money transmissions sent by workers to support their families. (HB 29; HB 1132)
4. Support bills which provide tuition benefits for immigrant veterans who have served our country, bills which would improve identification of victims of human trafficking, and bills which would provide emergency services to non-citizens. (HB 623; HB 712; HB 2381; HB 3373)

Mr. Chairmen, I would like to thank you for inviting me to testify before your committees today. Our nation stands at an important time in her history, when we need to remain vigilant against outside threats without sacrificing values which we hold dear—justice, fairness, and opportunity. We must honor and continue our history as an open and democratic society which values hard work and the contributions of immigrants. We recommend that State and local law enforcement officials should not be authorized to enforce immigration laws and we look to the federal government to seek a comprehensive immigration bill which is just, humane, and provides for the security needs of our country.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bishop James Tamayo, D.D.
Bishop of the Diocese of Laredo