



LEGISLATIVE ALERT

July 30, 2014

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 12.5 million members of the AFL-CIO and our community affiliate Working America, I urge you to vote no on the legislation providing supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2014, and for other purposes (H.R. 5230). While additional funding is necessary to care for child refugees from Central America, the funding levels in H.R. 5230 are misdirected and include dangerous policy changes that will permanently compromise our ability to identify and protect child refugees.

Since its founding, the United States has served as a beacon of hope and freedom for those fleeing political instability, repression, violence, poverty, and natural disasters. From great thinkers like Albert Einstein, to prominent diplomats like Madeleine Albright, to local business owners and union members, refugees have contributed greatly to our society and enriched our national fabric. We should not turn our backs on this rich tradition or our commitments under international law. Our commitments to refugees cannot be honored through expedited legal proceedings and removals envisioned in H.R. 5230 and Representative Cuellar's misnamed HUMANE Act (H.R. 5114). Children must be apprised of their rights in their native language and in an age appropriate manner; screened by trained professionals for exposure or vulnerability to abuse, violence, or trafficking; and provided legal counsel, not left to fend for themselves in our dysfunctional immigration system.

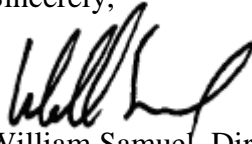
While a comprehensive approach is necessary to address the root causes of such a large-scale refugee situation, including the long-term impact of U.S. trade policies, the Departments of Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Justice, and State have immediate needs that must be addressed before Congress recesses. Unfortunately, the funding levels in H.R. 5230 are far too skewed towards border security and will not adequately ensure children eligible for protective status will be identified and not returned to danger. Funding for the Department of Justice to provide much needed legal representation for children is also noticeably absent.

Preserving due process is paramount. The AFL-CIO strongly objects to the policy changes in H.R. 5230 that limit due process for vulnerable populations at the border and run counter to established U.S. and international norms regarding the detainment of children and refugees. In particular, we firmly believe the essential protections in the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) should either be strengthened or maintained, but should under no circumstances be rolled back.

The AFL-CIO also objects to the provisions in H.R. 5230 that bar children from being placed in the custody of a nongovernmental sponsor. While children and families are awaiting full and fair legal proceedings, they should not be subjected to discredited detention procedures. Wherever possible, children should be released to the custody of family members while their cases are being processed. Alternatives to detention, such as intensive supervision, have produced good results and been proven to be both more humane and more cost effective.

For the reasons stated above, the AFL-CIO urges you to vote no on H.R. 5230 and instead allocate the additional funding necessary to properly care for child refugees from Central America without undermining TVPRA protections.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William Samuel', with a stylized flourish at the end.

William Samuel, Director
Government Affairs Department