

**Testimony of
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Hearing on “A Resolution calling upon the United States Congress to pass and President Obama to sign a just and humane comprehensive immigration reform bill in 2013”

**Submitted to
Committee on Immigration
New York City Council**

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I. Introduction

Chairman Dromm and members of the committee, I thank you for holding this timely hearing on comprehensive immigration reform, and I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee.

My name is Jessica Orozco and I am the Director of Immigration and Civic Engagement of the Hispanic Federation, a preeminent Latino organization dedicated to promoting the social, political and economic wellbeing of the Hispanic community. The Federation represents nearly 100 local, community-based organizations in the northeast that provide education, health, workforce development and other services to millions of Americans and immigrants annually.

Since its inception in 1990, the Federation has had a legacy of engaging in immigration, evidenced through our work in the Hispanic community and in Washington, DC. On a daily basis, our member agencies teach English, provide health care, promote financial literacy and otherwise ease the integration of immigrants into our society. We support and complement the work of our member agencies by advocating for public policies here in New York and at the federal level.

The importance of today’s hearing and resolution cannot be overstated. We are encouraged by this distinguished Committee’s resolution and too call on the members of Congress and President Obama to meaningfully address immigration reform in 2013.

HF has been and will continue to work tirelessly to pass immigration reform this year. Earlier this year HF issued its Policy Brief on Immigration Reform which highlights key principles necessary to enact fair and comprehensive reform. In addition, we are organizing immigration town halls to educate and mobilize the Latino community and allies in support of immigration reform. We will also be holding a lobby day in Washington, DC, sending hundreds of Latino community members to our nation’s capital to meet with legislators and advocate for the passage of immigration reform.

II. Background

There is a broad consensus that our immigration system is irrevocably broken, plagued by visa backlogs, bureaucratic delays and outdated policies. The impact on families is incalculable. Millions of U.S. citizens and immigrants alike are forced to wait excruciatingly long periods before they are

reunited with close family members. Latinos in the U.S. are disproportionately affected by the backlogs. Those wishing to sponsor an adult under the age of 21 from Mexico, for instance, sometimes wait over 20 years before the application is processed. Families are being torn apart. Nearly 45,000 undocumented parents of U.S. citizen children were deported in the first six months of 2012, and at least 5,100 of their children now live in foster care in 22 states, creating considerable public costs and great human suffering. The impact on the civil rights of Latinos is unjustifiable. 93% of Latinos under the age of 18 are U.S. citizens, as are 74% of Latino adults. Regardless of status, every Latino in the United States can have his/her civil rights violated by states and localities engaging in legally sanctioned racial profiling, be held for days in a local jail without charge, and detained without due process.

Our system is badly broken and it is a national shame. We can and we must do better.

III. Recommendations for a fair and humane immigration reform bill

The Hispanic Federation maintains that the following priorities are critical to advancing immigration legislation that is fair, preserves family unity and honors immigrants' significant contributions to our nation.

- *Provide a clear, fair and workable path to citizenship* for undocumented immigrants and their families which affords them immediate legal status to live and work from the onset of the bill's passage.
- *Restructure the immigration system so that it "works" for everyone*, providing for an orderly process, eliminating backlogs for families of U.S. citizens and permanent residents, H1-B visas, and other immigration applications.
- *Preserve family unity*, by creating relief from removal and a path to immediate legal status for parents of children who are citizens, and provide the ability of legal residents to bring immediate family members to the U.S. without years or decades of separation. And restoring equality in our immigration system by extending immigration rights to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) families.
- *Ensure due process and civil rights* for all U.S. residents, eliminating immigration policies and programs that lead to racial profiling or deny access to legal counsel and judicial review.
- *Re-establish and maintain federal pre-emption* by returning immigration enforcement policy to its place as a federal – not state or local – responsibility.
- *Establish strong worker protections* that protect all workers' right to organize and bargain collectively, provide occupational safety and health, and anti-discrimination protections.

IV. Conclusion

All of us in this room cherish the promise of the American dream. We now have an opportunity to make this dream a reality for the millions of friends, neighbors and community members who are ready to earn that opportunity if given a fair chance. Now is the time to bring them out of the shadows, fully integrate them into our society and have them join us as fellow American citizens. The time for immigration reform is now!