

Dear President Kathleen Passidomo and Speaker Paul Renner,

As faith leaders from diverse traditions, we are gravely concerned about the impacts of the companion bills SB 1718 and HB 1617. This legislation attempts to solve the nation's immigration crisis, but instead will cause a humanitarian disaster in Florida and wreak havoc in our economy. The legislation will unfairly target persons out of status and every sector of society that connects with them, including Florida houses of worship, schools, hospitals and businesses. The undersigned 72 faith leaders ask you to prevent this law from passing.

In our faith communities, our sacred scriptures tell us to welcome the immigrant in our midst and love our neighbors. We recall Leviticus 19:34 which states, "You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."

Florida's identity is as a place where immigrants find new life. Migration has made Florida into an economic powerhouse that showcases cultures from around the world. But if this legislation is adopted, its damage will send shockwaves across the country. Florida will be seen as the state that self-destructed over its fear of immigrants.

This bill attacks our religious freedom and criminalizes our ministries. We do not check for immigration status before we obey God in serving those in need. For the state to expect us to do so is for the state to demand we forsake our beliefs. SB 1718/HB 1617 would make it a felony to bring uninspected unaccompanied minors into the state; invalidate the use of driver licenses issued by other states to undocumented immigrants; invalidate community IDs; require Emergency Rooms to collect immigration status information for all patients; increase fines and penalties for hiring undocumented immigrants, and prevent DACA recipients from a license to practice law in Florida¹.

This legislation is anti-faith, anti-family, anti-health, and anti-safety. Many immigrant families are a mix of immigrant status. Elders and parents will be separated from their children. The mandate for hospitals to collect information on immigration status will cause a public health crisis with children and parents fearful to seek care. Parents will struggle to provide for their families and businesses will suffer from unjust fines and increased liabilities on employers. Witnesses to crimes will be unwilling to speak with police. The proof of citizenship elements will lead to profiling and disregard for basic rights of citizens based on "they look like an immigrant."

SB 1718/ HB 1617 will have a devastating impact on Florida and will be a divisive force among the people of our great state. As faith communities, our role is to promote the values of love, care for our neighbors, and peaceful unity among all. SB1718/HB 1617 does the opposite. We pray that our Florida legislature will do the right thing and stop SB 1718/HB 1617 from becoming law.

¹ Pinechet-Paul, Christian, March 20th, 2023, "Florida's Immigration Enforcement Legislation: Five Key Concerns," National Immigration Forum, <https://immigrationforum.org/article/floridas-immigration-enforcement-legislation-five-key-concerns/>

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Russell Meyer, Florida Council of Churches
Rev. Sandra Messick, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Rev John Vertigan, Florida Conference United Church of Christ
Bishop Aner Morejon, Brethren in Christ U. S.
Bishop Pedro Suarez, Florida-Bahamas Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Deacon Connie Schmucker, Florida-Bahamas Synod, ELCA
Rev. Chad Fair, Immanuel Lutheran, Palm Coast
Rev. Dr. Neddy Astudillo, Presbyterian Church USA
The Rev. Dr. W. Harvey Jenkins, Jr, Presbytery of Florida (PCUSA)
The Reverend Grace Gravelle, St. Matthew Lutheran, Jacksonville
Rev. Dr. George Cruz-Martinez, Hope Lutheran Church, Satsuma
Ms. Beverly Rivera, Hope Lutheran Church, Satsuma
Senior Pastor A. D. Shaw, Shekinah Glory Church Of God In Christ
Professor Arthur Kane, Pax Christi Florida
The Reverend Wilfred S Allen-Faiella, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Reverend Evan, Congregational United Church of Christ
The Rev. Franklin Eric Wester, Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Rev. Thomas K Holdcraft, St. Stephen Lutheran Church
Pastor Bernice Powell Jackson, First United Church of Tampa
Rev. Dr. Gabriel Morgan, St. Paul Lutheran Church in Tampa
Mr. David Sinclair, Primera Iglesia Presbiteriana Hispana de Tampa
Rev. Dr. Jon Keiser, Florida Bahamas Synod
The Rev. Richard Dow, Memorial Lutheran Church St. Augustine, FL
Rev. Anna Enderle, Mandarin Lutheran Church
Rev. Daniel Locke Daniel Locke, St. Mark's Lutheran
Reverend Scott-Eric Lindner, Atonement Lutheran Church of Wesley Chapel
Pastor Ross Worch, Advent Lutheran, Orange Park
Reverend Jody Rice, St. Andrews Lutheran Church
Rva. Migdaleder Mazuera, Presbyterian Church
Rev. Kathleen Korb, Unitarian Universalist Association
Rev. Richard Murphy, UU Church St. Petersburg
Rev. Rev. Richard Hafer, Christ Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Rev. Frank Wagner, Florida Bahamas Synod
Co-Founder, Sue Blythe, Interfaith Climate Group
Rev. Rev. Edward Benoway, All Saints Lutheran Church
Co-Founder Shannon Larsen, Ancient Trees
Rev. Patricia Harris, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church Fernandina Beach
Pastor Bob Hale, PoP! ELCA
Reverend Ann Goraczko, Episcopal Church
Pastor David Monduy, Iglesia Rescate
Pastor Ruben Gimenez, Centro AFE

Pastor Lori Fuller, Palms Deaf Church
Pastor Rodolfo Lorenzo, Iglesia Rey de Reyes
Lider Roca Kids Nubia Gaitan, Casa Roca Miami
Pastor The Reverend Lois Ann Sorensen, Reformation Lutheran Church
Reverend Rev Donald Erickson, Rock of Ages Lutheran Church
Rabbi Sunny Schnitzer, Bat Yam Temple of the Islands
Pastor Carlos Uribe, Reyes y Sacerdote
Dr. Maria Sgambati, Plum Village Community of Thich Nhat Hahn
Sr Pastor Yuniel Iglesias , Bet-El. El Monte de Su Presencia.
Reverend Susan Rogers, The Well at Springfield
Pastor Bob Hoffman , Shepherd of the Glades Lutheran Church
Copastor Angel, Iglesia Cristiana Bethel
Pastor Luis Parra, Iglesia torre fuerte of Miami
Pastora Teresa Rodriguez, Revelation Church
Rev. Jeffrey Unga, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Senior Pastor Juan De La Cruz, Ministerio Internacional
Rev. Dr. Brant S. Copeland, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Pastor Rev. Kathryn Carroll, Chair, Global Missions Committee, Florida-Bahamas Synod
The Reverend Licia Affer, The Episcopal Church
The Rev. Dr. Keith A. Spencer, Trinity Lutheran, Pembroke Pines
Miguel Segura, Minit internc Jesucristo rey de reyes
Rev. Charles May, ELCA Pastor
Max Hernandez, One Love
The Rev. Horace Ward , The Episcopal Church of the Holy Family
Rev. Kathryn Carroll, ELCA
Lynda R Mack, Florida Council of Churches
Rev. William C Hamilton Jr, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)
Rev. Angel Ortiz, First Spanish Presbyterian Church and El Cordero Presbyterian Church
Rev. Esther Robles, First United Church of Tampa
Od'Juan Whitfield, Faith In Public Life