

## Statement of Ora Richards, Vice Chair of PICC

My name is Ora Richards. In 1996, due to the civil unrest in Liberia, my family was stripped of all our possessions, and we were forced to leave our country under traumatic circumstances. Coming to America, was one of the most difficult decisions that we have ever had to make. We have had to practically assume a new identity, an adjustment that has indeed been challenging, rewarding and life changing.

My family has fallen in love with this great, beautiful, historic city, because Philadelphia has been good to us. We have had an opportunity here to educate our children in some of the finest schools and colleges and to provide for family not only here in the U.S. but also in Liberia.

I am here today as Vice Chair of the Board of Directors of PICC. Philadelphia is home to many vibrant immigrant communities. We work hard and make many valuable contributions to our new country.

But the laws here:

- Keep us separated from our families
- Keep us hidden in the shadows without legal status and
- Keep us subject to exploitation.

Several proposals and bills have been introduced over the past few months. Today, Democratic leaders in Congress will introduce new legislation, which includes the key principles of comprehensive reform. All of these proposals recognize that the immigration system in this country is broken.

Today, we join with immigrants and advocates in more than 30 cities around the country to call for a bipartisan effort to fix our immigration system. Any solution must include comprehensive reform that rewards hard-working, tax-paying immigrants with a path to legal status.

1. Reunite families: Reduce the years of family separation caused by a backlogged bureaucracy and unduly restrictive laws.
2. Reward work: Give immigrants who are in the U.S., working hard, paying taxes, and learning English a chance to earn legal residency over time, and to get on the path to citizenship.
3. Respect workers: Reduce exploitation by creating a worker visa program that protects the wages and working conditions of all workers in the U.S. and provides equal rights to immigrant workers here, now, and those to be admitted in the future.
4. Reduce illegal immigration: Devise fair and reasonable rules that are realistic and enforceable. Replace the current chaotic, deadly, and illegal flow of exploitable workers and desperate family members with an orderly, safe, and legal flow of workers with full labor rights and family members with legal immigrant visas.

Our immigration system is complex. Real immigration reform has to address all of these issues.

We know that immigration reform doesn't happen overnight but Congress can act now to pass current immigration legislation this year. They should immediately pass the AgJOBS Bill so that farmworkers can earn legal residency, and they should enact the DREAM Act so that immigrant high school graduates have the chance to realize the American Dream through a college education.

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