

# MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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March 26, 1990

TO THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES AND ELDERLY AFFAIRS:

My name is Gerald D'Avolio. I am Executive Director of the Massachusetts Catholic Conference representing the four Roman Catholic Dioceses of Massachusetts.

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference supports House Bill 1711, sponsored by Representative Byron Rushing and thirty-eight legislators, ensuring equal access to state services for all residents of the Commonwealth. At the same time, we oppose Senate Bills 595 and 609, sponsored by Senator Lees and Senator Locke respectively, limiting access to certain benefits and public assistance to citizens and legal aliens.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has an uneven history in extending a welcome and equal treatment of new peoples. We were wrong when we denied full protection of the law to immigrants in the nineteenth century. We can yield to the same fears and prejudices toward new peoples today.

The Catholic Church recognizes the inherent, God-given dignity of each human person, irrespective of racial or national origin and also the right to migrate to seek justice and peace. The dignity must be upheld by society's effort to provide for the basic needs of those who find themselves particularly vulnerable in a new and unfamiliar environment. These new people usually come to us today with extraordinarily painful histories. Their hope is similar to the hope which motivated and sustained our forebears who had the courage to explore a new life in a new world.

Reliable statistics make clear that recent immigrants, even those who are undocumented, become productive contributors to the Commonwealth. The criminal activity of a few deserves swift and appropriate justice, but is not present in these immigrants to any greater degree than in the general population. Distorted myths only fuel fear and hostility.

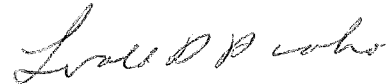
On the practical level, legislation restricting state services to citizens and documented aliens would necessitate an administrative bureaucracy that would be extremely costly and would increase the need for more expensive medical intervention in emergency situations thus requiring increased state funding. It could make very difficult the control of contagious disease. It would condemn some conscientious objectors in other lands, who are not covered by our stringent immigration policies, to torture and even death. Moreover, it is important to note for the record that most immigrants pay more in taxes than they seek in state services and benefits.

Hence, these moral and practical considerations lead the Massachusetts Catholic Conference to support H. 1711 and oppose S. 595 and S. 609. We also hope that, when the Governor's Fiscal Year 1991 budget is brought to the Floor, the drastic cuts proposed in H. 1-Outside Sections 119, 121, and 123 would be eliminated for the very same reasons enunciated in this statement.

As past experience proves, our new immigrants promise to enrich and contribute to our society in ways we can not yet imagine.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,



Gerald D'Avolio  
Executive Director