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To: Senate General Laws Committee  
From: Missouri Catholic Conference  
Date: January 17, 2012  
Re: Opposition to SB 590, Immigration Policy

**“Migration and the problems to which it gives rise must be  
addressed humanely, with justice and compassion.”**  
Pope Benedict XVI

SB 590 is a harsh, unnecessary response to immigration concerns that does little to address the complex nature of the issue. It puts increased burden on public school systems and local law enforcement agencies at a time when resources are scarce. It also makes numerous changes to immigration policy that will affect all Missouri residents, even those who are lawful citizens.

Under SB 590 public elementary and secondary schools and local law enforcement agencies will be required to become actively involved in determining the status of all persons they encounter and serve. All parents, even Missouri citizens, will be required to show the birth documents of their children before enrolling in schools. Schools will also be required to keep records of undocumented students and report those numbers to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

In addition to performing their regular duties, law enforcement officials who make a lawful stop, detention or arrest, would have to check the immigration status of any person they suspect is unlawfully present in the country. This verges on racial profiling as any lawful Missouri resident who may have characteristics associated with undocumented aliens will be required to carry proof of citizenship at all times. Additionally, law enforcement will now be required to assist with the transfer of undocumented persons into federal custody.

**This legislation punishes everyone—the school parent, the citizen who has a legal drivers license and may look like an “illegal alien,” the overburdened school principal and law enforcement official and the taxpayer who must foot the bill for this overreaction to concerns regarding undocumented persons. In the end, all Missourians lose when a climate of distrust and divisiveness is fostered in our state.**

In recent years, the MCC has consistently urged Missouri lawmakers to defer to Congress as the appropriate body to consider comprehensive reform of federal immigration laws. Congress unfortunately has failed to pass such legislation and states are increasingly inclined to take matters into their own hands. Nonetheless the MCC continues to assert that immigration reform is the responsibility of the federal government. The enactment of fifty separate immigration policies across the nation can only lead to further confusion.

Catholic teaching respects the need for nations to have national boundaries but also asserts that regardless of national boundaries people have a right to migrate when faced with circumstances such as drought, famine, persecution or severe poverty. In their 2001 statement, “*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*,” the U. S. Catholic bishops state:

We recognize that nations have the right to control their borders. We also recognize and strongly assert that all human persons, created as they are in the image and likeness of God, possess a fundamental dignity that gives rise to a more compelling claim to the conditions worthy of human life.

The U.S. Catholic bishops joined with the Catholic bishops of Mexico in 2003 in making this point again in the statement, “*Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*”:

The Church recognizes the right of a sovereign state to control its borders in furtherance of the common good. It also recognized the right of human persons to migrate so they can realize their God-given rights.

Pope Benedict in his 2007 Address on the State of the World observed:

Another concern which looms ever larger is threat of the movement of persons: millions of men and women who are forced to leave their homes or their native lands because of violence in order to seek more dignified living conditions. It is an illusion to think that migration can be blocked or checked simply by force. Migration and the problems to which it gives rise must be addressed humanely, with justice and compassion.

In testifying before Congress, the U.S. Catholic bishops have called for comprehensive reforms of the nation’s policies toward migrants. The bishops have urged assistance to poorer nations so they can address the standard living conditions of their people and thereby reduce the migration of people. The bishops have called for the establishment of an earned legalization process, for realistic immigration allotments that will allow more unskilled workers to enter the U.S. legally, and for a process by which family members may reunite.

In conclusion, the Missouri Catholic Conference believes SB 590 is an ineffective piecemeal approach to immigration reform that imposes a costly, unnecessary burden on public schools systems and law enforcement agencies. It will place additional requirements on all Missouri residents, even those who are lawful citizens. Finally, it will foster a climate of distrust and divisiveness not worthy of the charitable spirit so prominent among the people of our state. **Therefore, we urge a NO vote on SB 590.**