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OPINION

Take into Account What's Best for Children

We need immigration reform now

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

the child population.

Nine-year-old Jaime Gordillo Villa was born in the United States and is a good student who has gotten awards for both good grades and behavior. He wants to be a lawyer when he grows up to help immigrants and others who need help. He says he doesn't want people to suffer for things they didn't do.



Immigrant populations are diverse, but many children in immigrant families face significant challenges to their health and well-being, including poverty, lack of health insurance, low educational attainment, substandard housing, and language barriers. Any long term solution to our immigra-

grants—the majority of whom are U.S. citizens—will continue to suffer from trauma and fear of deportation which can lead to costly health consequences in their adult lives.

The Children's Defense Fund has joined with many child and family advocates supporting a set of key principles for children we hope Congress and the Administration will incorporate in immigration reform without more delay. Limbo is a very bad place for children to live.

and their families. Protecting a child's human rights should include ensuring children receive legal representation before all immigration authorities and, for all unaccompanied children, the appointment of an independent child advocate from the moment of detention throughout the course of any immigration or other related court proceedings.

Third, we need to ensure enforcement efforts have appropriate protections for children. In all enforce-

ment. All policies regarding admissibility, enforcement, detention, and deportation of children and their parents must consider the best interests of children, including enabling immigration judges to exercise discretion in admission and removal decisions based on the hardship to U.S. citizen and lawful permanent resident children.

The immigration system must be updated by resolving current backlogs and ensuring family-based immigration channels are adequate for future migration without lengthy family separation.

As the youngest and most vulnerable members of our society, every child within our borders should have access to the services and resources they need to survive, grow, and thrive.

As our nation's leaders, hopefully, move forward with the important task of reforming federal immigration laws, I hope they will take into account the unique needs of children. Please urge your member in the House of Representatives to take action on immigration reform that promotes child well-being by ensuring families stay together and gives all children the opportunity to grow and thrive. The Senate has acted. The House must vote—now.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

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tion system must take into account what is best for these children.

Family-focused immigration reform would result in better child health. Our current immigration policies push families apart and children into illness and poverty. A recent report from Human Impact Partners finds that if current policies remain unchanged, 43,000 U.S. citizen children will experience a decline in health status, 100,000 will develop signs of withdrawal, and over 125,000 will go hungry in the next year.

Children of undocumented immi-

First, we believe there must be a direct, clear, and reasonable pathway to citizenship. Any pathway to citizenship must be open, affordable, safe, and accessible to children in need of status, including beneficiaries of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, undocumented children under the age of 21, and unaccompanied immigrant children.

Second, our immigration system must uphold children's basic human rights and ensure access to critical public services, programs, and economic supports for children

ment actions, including those along the border, the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration and children must be given the benefit of the doubt during any investigation or detention. There should be appropriate and accountable training policies for interacting with and screening children that reflect a humanitarian and protection-oriented approach, prohibit the use of force with children, and create reasonable and safe conditions for children.

Finally, we must keep families

Supporting this Bill is the Right Thing to Do

Job protections for all of our brothers, sisters

BY REV. LEONARD B. JACKSON

You probably don't think twice about sharing a photo of your loved ones at work or talking with coworkers about vacation plans with your family. But for some



Americans, these simple acts put their jobs and livelihoods at risk.

Here's why. Though eight out of 10 Americans don't know it, in most states you can still be fired for being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT).

In Nevada, where I live, we protect LGBT people from employment discrimination. But too many other states have yet to take that simple step. There are no state laws protecting LGBT Americans against workplace discrimination based on

sexual orientation in 29 states and no state law protections for gender identity in 33 states.

The Senate recently took a major step toward ending this kind of discrimination by passing the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (co-sponsored by Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore.) ENDA would make it illegal to fire, refuse to hire, or refuse to promote employees because of their sexual orientation or gender identity — no matter what state you happen to live in.

I certainly don't want to see my LGBT brothers and sisters being fired for something that has nothing to do with how well they do their job. And neither do Americans across the country.

Recent polling finds that close to 70 percent of voters favor a federal law protecting LGBT people from workplace discrimination.

Maybe that's because I, like most of us, grew up being taught the "Golden Rule" — that basic idea, found in faith teachings and secular traditions alike — that we should

treat others as we'd like to be treated. I was taught to honor and respect others, even if they might be a little different from me.

Here's what I wasn't taught: Treat others as you would like to be treated, unless they are gay. What I wasn't taught was to fight discrimination, unless someone is transgender.

As a Christian minister, I'm tired of hearing mistrust and fear cloaked in the language of religion.

Here's what I can tell you about my faith. My faith tells me that I should work toward promoting unity and justice for all people. My faith tells me that when I see a wrong, I should work to right it. My faith tells me, in the words of Mark 12:31: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater."

Thus, I shall treat others with dignity, respect, and love.

And that's why I feel called today to speak out in support of ENDA. Like many other issues I've worked on, from mass incarceration to civil liberties for all, employment discrimination is not just a policy

issue — it's an urgent moral issue. It's a clear question of right and wrong, of opportunity and fairness versus discrimination.

The Senate has done the right thing by passing ENDA. Now it's the House's turn.

As President Barack Obama recently wrote, in our country "people should be judged on the merits: on the contributions they make in their

workplaces and communities, and on what Martin Luther King Jr. called 'the content of their character.'"

Supporting this bill is simply the right, moral thing to do. All of us should encourage our legislators to stand up for these critical, commonsense protections.

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