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CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF ILLINOIS CALL UPON CONGRESS TO ENACT COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM LEGISLATION

Bishops Favor McCain –Kennedy Proposal (S 1033) over H.R. 4437

CHICAGO (March 27, 2006) – The leaders of the six Catholic Dioceses of Illinois called today upon the U.S. Congress “to enact comprehensive immigration reform legislation,” and favored the reform approach contained in the McCain-Kennedy proposal (S 1033) as legislation best designed to “lead to a genuine welcome for the stranger in our midst.”

Writing today in a statement issued by the Catholic Conference of Illinois, Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I., Archbishop of Chicago, joined Bishops Joseph L. Imesch of Joliet, Thomas G. Doran of Rockford, George J. Lucas of Springfield, Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C., of Peoria and Edward K. Braxton of Belleville to denounce “our current system of immigration and border control [that] does not work” and to call for “sensible immigration reform that secures our borders, establishes realistic enforcement strategies that will restore the rule of law, but that also allows for non-documented men and women to move towards a fully documented, legally recognized status and provides a safe, orderly, and fair system for those who wish to come to work in the United States.”

Noting that they “are pastors, not politicians,” the Catholic bishops offered “general principles” for what they believe reform legislation should “look like”: new law “ought to be

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structured so as not to appear to reward those who have not obeyed the current immigration laws,” should “provide for reasonable penalties for those who are currently undocumented and

wish to remain in the U.S. without disrupting their current economic situation or separating their families,” and “should also ensure that those who remain in the United States demonstrate that they have the potential to be productive, law abiding citizens.”

A reformed immigration system, wrote the bishops, “should also provide the greatest incentives for people to enter the U.S. through the normal, though revised, immigration process by providing realistic opportunities, reflective of the demands of the labor market, to enter the U.S. in order to work (at even non-skilled or low-skilled jobs).”

“We find the McCain-Kennedy proposal (S 1033) in the Senate accommodates most of these principles,” wrote the bishops.

“While recognizing the reasonable demand in a ‘post 9-11’ world to restore the rule of law and to protect our borders, these goals cannot sensibly be accomplished through unfair laws and regulations that would criminalize...the pastoral, social or health care that our churches, social service organizations, hospitals and volunteer groups provide to all people without discrimination or question of status or legal condition.”

“These undocumented immigrants are our friends, our neighbors, our fellow human beings bound to us by a common humanity. Any just response to immigration reform must be rooted in the recognition that, ultimately, we are one human family.”

The full statement of the Catholic Bishops of Illinois is attached.

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