

LWVSNM Immigration Position

June 2020

(awaiting concurrence with LWVSNM)

BACKGROUND:

In Southern New Mexico we have witnessed the tragic consequences of the current administration's zero tolerance immigration enforcement policy. We believe immigration reform must be one of the LWVUS's top lobbying efforts until a more just immigration policy is enacted. We are encouraged that LWVUS has recently taken a strong stance on immigration (<https://www.lwv.org/other-issues/immigration>).

The Remain in Mexico Policy, Metering, the 3rd Country Asylum Rule, the horrible conditions of the detention centers and shelters in Mexico, and the practice of separating families, not only are contrary to the League's Immigration Position, but violate the basic human rights of those seeking asylum.

The Remain in Mexico Program (Migrant Protection Protocols, MPP) has forced thousands of migrants applying for U.S. asylum to return to Mexico while their cases are being processed. U.S. asylum law states that anyone who steps foot in the U.S. at any point along the US-Mexico border may request asylum, yet the practice known as metering limits the number of people who can request asylum at a port of entry. As a result, families must wait for months in crowded camps and shelters at border crossings in order not to lose their place in line. Asylum seekers living in these conditions are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 and becoming sick and dying. In Ciudad Juárez where thousands of asylum seekers are waiting in shelters, reports of kidnappings, rapes, disappearances, and death are common.

In the meantime, thousands of beds remain empty at hospitality centers run and largely supported by volunteers in El Paso, Las Cruces, and other cities in Southern New Mexico committed to helping refugees travel safely to families in the U.S. where they may await their asylum hearings.

The 3rd Country Asylum Rule is counter to the League's position, as well. According to this rule, people traveling from Central and South America, for example, to seek asylum in the United States, must first apply for asylum in Guatemala which has been determined a safe country. Yet, the violence, extortion, and corruption in Guatemala have forced thousands of Guatemalans to flee their country, making it far from a safe haven for refugees.

The appalling conditions of the family detention centers, the immoral Family Separation Policy, and the corresponding failure to reunite many families because of inadequate record keeping is unconscionable. These practices have been condemned by many human rights organizations and must be condemned by the League, as well.

The immigration system has been broken for many years, but the level of human misery caused by recent policies is unprecedented. These policies are contrary to our values. They are unnecessary, and deliberately cruel. Those of us who live in the borderlands are witness to this suffering and believe that the League must address this humanitarian crisis at the border. (For a fuller discussion of these issues, please see the LWVSNM Advocacy Statement).

The LWVSNM position supports making immigration reform a top priority in the United States through the following actions:

- ensure fair and humane treatment under the law for all persons;
- restore fair access to the U.S asylum system for those escaping violence and persecution, including repealing Operation streamline;
- reunify families and end the deportation of unaccompanied children and teenagers without due process;
- reinstate safe release of detainees to family or friends;
- reinstate Family Case Management Program as an alternative to family detention;
- work towards decriminalizing undocumented entry and re-entry;
- end deportations of unauthorized immigrants with no criminal record;
- eliminate the use of for-profit prisons to detain migrants and asylum seekers;
- create a path for citizenship for Dreamers (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals);
- provide for unauthorized immigrants already in the country to earn legal status;
- provide for student and work visas;
- incorporate immigrants into our communities by providing access to education;
- endorse the development of secure identification documents;
- respect the right of state and local law enforcement personnel to perform their duties without the burden of enforcing federal immigration policies;
- increase resources to address the root causes of poverty and violence in Central America;
- designate the countries of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador for temporary protected status