

**Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Hearing On “Comprehensive Immigration Reform Legislation”
April 19, 2013**

The Committee will work with Secretary Napolitano to reschedule her testimony given the ongoing events in Massachusetts. Her attention is needed on that matter this morning. I thank Mr. Holtz-Eakin and Mr. Kirsanow for being with us today and we will go forward with our discussion about the economic aspects of immigration reform.

The bipartisan proposal establishes a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants in this country. It addresses the lengthy backlogs in our current immigration system – backlogs that have kept families apart sometimes for decades. It grants a faster track to the “dreamers” brought to this country as children through no fault of their own, and to agricultural workers who are an essential part of our communities and work so hard to provide our nation’s food supply. It makes important changes to the visas used by dairy farmers and the tourism industry and by immigrant investors who are making investments in our communities. It addresses the needs of our law enforcement community, which requires the help of immigrants who witness crime or are victims of domestic violence. It improves the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers so that the United States will remain the beacon of hope in the world.

But in other ways, I fear it does not live up to our values. This bill includes what some are calling “triggers” that I am concerned could long delay green cards for those who we want to make full and contributing participants in our society. I do not want for people to move out of the shadows only to be stuck in some underclass. Just as we should not fault “dreamers” who were brought here as children, we should not make people’s fates and future status depend on border enforcement conditions over which they have no control. And I am disappointed that the legislation does not treat all American families equally. We must end the discrimination that gay and lesbian families face in our immigration law. I also am concerned about changes to the visa system for siblings and the lack of clarity about how the new point-based visa system will work in practice. And I cannot help but question whether spending billions more on a fence between the United States and Mexico is really the best use of taxpayer dollars.

I recognize this bill was the product of compromise, and I have no doubt it involved difficult concessions by all involved. I commend Senator Schumer, Senator McCain, Senator Durbin, Senator Graham, Senator Menendez, Senator Rubio, Senator Bennet, Senator Flake and Senator Feinstein for their extraordinary work. Now it is time for us on this Committee to invite the public into this process.

Today’s immigration hearing is the fourth this year, and we will hold day of hearings on Monday. I hope that Senators on this Committee will not seek to delay our progress. I expect today’s hearing and our next hearing will give Senators and the public an opportunity to learn about all aspects of this important legislation.

Throughout our history, immigration has been an ongoing source of renewal of our spirit, our creativity and our economic strength. From the young students brought to this country by their

loving parents seeking a better life, to the hardworking men and women who play vital roles supporting our farmers, innovating for our technology companies, or creating businesses of their own, our Nation continues to benefit from immigrants. We need to uphold the fundamental values of family, hard work and fairness.

In Vermont, immigration has promoted cultural richness through refugee resettlement and student exchange, economic development through the EB-5 Regional Center program, and tourism and trade with our friends in Canada. Foreign agricultural workers support Vermont's farmers and growers, many of whom have become a part of farm families that are woven into the fabric of Vermont's agricultural community.

The dysfunction in our current immigration system affects all of us. It is time to fix it. Now is our opportunity to do so. We must act deliberately and without delay. Millions of people – millions of Americans – are depending on us.

#####