

Five members of the Our Lady of Hope Social Justice and Peace commission met with our Maine Senators, Angus King and Susan Collins, and their staff, as part of the Jesuit Parish Advocacy Day sponsored by the Ignatian Solidarity Network. The commission members advocated for policies to welcome and protect migrants—refugees and asylum seekers—despite the difficulties raised by the coronavirus pandemic.

The advocacy for humane treatment of migrants is based in our Catholic faith, as Pope Francis urges us “to stand in the shoes of those brothers and sisters of ours who risk their lives to offer a future to their children.”

The three areas of concern raised were:

- DACA recipients (undocumented young people brought to our country as children) and the need for Congress to enact a bill to give them a path to citizenship. The recent Supreme Court decision gives them a reprieve, but they need a permanent solution. Our country needs these wonderful young people, many of whom are health professionals, to become citizens.
- People in detention because of their immigration status are at high risk for contracting COVID-19 and for spreading it to people in their home countries if they are deported. There are 200 detention centers in the US with covid outbreaks in more than a quarter of those facilities. Children who are detained with their families or who are deported alone when unaccompanied are a particular concern.
- The backlog of cases for asylum-seekers means that people are waiting for as much as two years before their cases are heard. The first 6 months of that time they are not allowed to work. As Senator Collins pointed out, the inability to work breeds resentment of immigrants and frustrates hard-working people who want to be able to take care of their families.

In response, both senators appreciated and shared the spiritual basis for our views. Senator King joined 46 of his Senate colleagues in a letter urging Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to immediately take up the bipartisan House-passed *American Dream and Promise Act*, which would establish a path to citizenship for Dreamers and immigrants with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or Deferred Enforced Departure (DED). Both senators were pessimistic about the chances of the Senate taking a vote on either this House-passed bill or a Senate bill before the election.

Both senators raised alarm about the actions of the Department of Homeland Security and the current conditions for asylum seekers. Senator Collins has been advocating for more judges to be hired to adjudicate asylum seekers petitions and is working on a bill to allow asylum seekers to be permitted to work upon arrival.

We were surprised and pleased by the time and attention the senators gave to our concerns. We appreciate the work and support of the Ignatian Solidarity Network in their organization efforts.