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PRESS RELEASE

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SUBJECT BISHOP SPEAKS OUT ON PENDING LEGISLATION

As Congress debates the "Contract with America," Fall River Bishop Sean O'Malley, OFM, Cap. has issued a statement opposing a component of the Contract which if passed, he believes, would endanger the well-being of legal immigrant families in this country.

In his statement the bishop points out that the proposal within the "Contract with America" entitled the Personal Responsibility Act would make most legal immigrants ineligible for some 60 federally-funded assistance programs, among them emergency food and shelter, health care, social services, job training, and school lunches.

Currently certain categories of low-income legal immigrants can participate in federally-assisted programs.

"How can we deny SSI benefits to a legal immigrant who is disabled on the job," the bishop questions, "or deny access to migrant health centers to children of non-citizen migrant workers who are legally in the United States?"

Bishop O'Malley feels the Personal Responsibility Act would greatly limit the rights of immigrants who are legal residents of this country and who pay the same taxes as its citizens.

Such legislation, he adds, is a "radical departure from the social policies which America has hitherto practiced with regard to immigrants" whose contributions over the years have been an integral part of the country's social and economic development.

The bishop urges that support be given to legal immigrants to maintain what is and should be rightfully theirs.

His statement has been forwarded to members of the Massachusetts Congressional delegation.

Its complete text follows.

Statement of Bishop O'Malley

The Catholic Church has always been deeply involved with the immigrant populations in the United States. We are alarmed by the anti-immigrant sentiment and exploitation which is occurring in our country. It has moved beyond issues involving illegal immigrants and is aiming to curtail the rights of immigrants who are legal residents of the United States.

The "Contract with America" which is currently being debated in Washington includes the Personal Responsibility Act, a piece of legislation which, I feel, threatens the well-being of LEGAL immigrant families in America. It is a radical departure from the social policies which America has hitherto practiced with regard to the immigrants who have been the backbone of the nation's social and economic development.

Under current law certain categories of low-income immigrants are generally permitted to participate in federally-assisted programs. The legal immigrants allowed to participate include many permanent residents who have "green cards" as well as some categories of immigrants fleeing oppression abroad. Legal immigrants are subject to

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the same taxes in this country as citizens.

The Personal Responsibility Act would make most LEGAL immigrants ineligible for about 60 federally-funded health, education, job training, housing, social service, food stamp, school lunch, emergency food and shelter, and income security programs. (Exempted are legal immigrants over 75 who have lived in the United States for at least five years.)

How can we deny SSI benefits to a legal immigrant who is disabled on the job, or deny access to migrant health centers to children of non-citizen migrant workers who are legally in the United States?

We must recognize that these families have been the foundation of America and in a particular way of Southeastern Massachusetts. They have shared their cultures, which enrich all our lives. Their commitment to work has provided the area with one of the most reliable work forces in the country. Immigrants have been contributing members to our society, not only by work but also by their commitment to family, community and Church. We must support them in maintaining what is rightfully theirs by opposing the Personal Responsibility Act.

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