

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**UH Law Center Experts Available to Discuss Immigration Reform Bill**

A bipartisan group of eight senators today unveiled its Comprehensive Immigration Reform bill to overhaul the country's immigration system with improved border security a prerequisite to implementation of a 13-year path to citizenship for the nation's estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants. The 844-page proposal details steps that must be taken to secure the border, outlines fines, fees and timelines for eventual legal status, and addresses a broad array of immigration issues from employment visas to the Dream Act. The bill is considered the most sweeping attempt to reform the nation's immigration policy in 26 years.

Experts from the University of Houston Law Center are available to comment on the bill.

**BROADER CONTEXT OF IMMIGRATION ISSUE**

[Michael A. Olivas](#), holder of the William B. Bates Distinguished Chair of Law, can provide an overview of the reform bill and comment on the broader context of the immigration issue. A nationally recognized immigration scholar, Olivas is the director of the Institute for Higher Education Law and Governance.

Olivas commented, "This first draft is groundbreaking in its comprehensiveness, although I have not read all 800+ pages. It covers many important points, and is a good framework for negotiation. While it has many generous provisions that will likely clear many of the longstanding problems with the 1996 revisions, it still is not our better angel yet. It will require far too many years for eligible persons to naturalize, it still will have a number of due process weaknesses, and some of the family reunification provisions will be trimmed.

"Linking the procedures to vague security metrics is a mistake, and we are being too punitive in the provisions for fines and back taxes, especially when we have not enforced wage and labor protections for this population. In my view, the best features are the streamlined provisions for DREAMers and DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients, the speeding up of the waiting lines for Permanent Residents—many of whom now have to wait over a decade—and the loosening up of the procedures for entrepreneurs and business people.

"There are still too many devils in these details, but I am hopeful that the give and take of the process will improve the bill, and I congratulate both the Senate and President Obama for moving this issue ahead."

**PROCEDURAL ADVANCES AND PROVISIONS**

[Geoffrey Hoffman](#), clinical associate professor of law, can comment on the important advances in due process protections that the bill contains, and provisions in the bill concerning the right to counsel. Hoffman is the director of the UH Law Center's Immigration Clinic.

Hoffman said, "The bill requires the Department of Homeland Security to 'immediately' determine whether an alien will remain in custody or be released, and requires DHS to inform the noncitizen within 72 hours of being taken into custody the 'reasons for continued custody' and any bond amount.

Immigrants have had to wait weeks or in some cases longer for a determination on whether they would be released.”

Hoffman also noted, “Previously and currently, access to counsel and protections for noncitizens in removal proceedings were and are very poor. The bill now appears to provide for appointed counsel to certain classes of noncitizens, such as unaccompanied minors, the mentally disabled or those ‘particularly vulnerable when compared to other aliens in removal proceedings.’

“This could be a huge advance in protecting the rights of the most vulnerable in removal proceedings. It further gives the attorney general the authority to appoint counsel at government’s expense to noncitizens in proceedings, at the government’s discretion. Although it remains to be seen how such a provision would be implemented, it is most promising language and potentially could be a huge step forward for immigrants’ rights.”

**For more information:**

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**About the University of Houston Law Center**

The [University of Houston Law Center](#) is the leading law school in the nation's fourth-largest city. Founded in 1947, it is a top-tier institution awarding Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D.) and Master of Laws (LL.M.) degrees. The Law Center is fully accredited by the American Bar Association and is a member of the Association of American Law Schools.