

Human Rights First

Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

<https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/press-release/house-legislation-would-target-gang-victims-seeking-asylum>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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If you are seeking asylum, we can help

Areas of Focus

Current Initiatives

Washington, D.C. Human Rights First today condemned the passage of the Criminal Alien Gang Member Removal Act in the House of Representatives, and urged the Senate to reject the legislation, which would have severely negative consequences for asylum seekers and refugees fleeing persecution.

This bill despite its name would not target criminal aliens nor gang members. Instead, it would only serve to further stigmatize Central American youth and their families, including those who are fleeing from the same violence members of Congress purport to target with this legislation, said Human Rights First's Jennifer Quigley.

Human Rights First notes that today's legislation may lead to unjust detention and deportation of asylum seekers, and will bring the United States into conflict with its treaty obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Provisions in the bill would be applied to people who were victims of these groups or who were merely in the vicinity of, living with, or who had some other non-criminal connection to, persons involved in criminal activity.

The bill would make it possible to deport or bar from refugee protection anyone whom the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) or an immigration judge has reason to believe is or has been a member of a criminal gang, or who has contact with criminal gangs including its non-criminal activities. Human Rights First notes, however, that reason to believe is an inappropriately low standard of proof, particularly with respect to alleged activities or associations that in many cases may have arisen in the United States. The criminal justice system exists to establish responsibility for violations of American law. This bill is an attempt to sidestep that system and subject non-citizens to draconian penalties, including return to countries where their lives and freedom may be threatened, on mere suspicion.

With this bill, we are essentially telling the victims of gang violence in their home countries that the United States will no longer offer them protection. That is simply un-American, and we urge the Senate to reject any efforts to betray our country's proud history of protecting the persecuted, added Quigley.

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Urge Congress to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act

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