

July 13, 2015

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Re: NHLA Opposition to Vitter and Cotton Amendments to S. 1177, Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization

Dear Senator:

We write on behalf of the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda (NHLA), a coalition of 39 leading national Latino nonpartisan civil rights and advocacy organizations, to strongly urge you to vote against any proposals to prohibit federal funding to any municipalities based on their limited cooperation with federal immigration enforcement.

Senators David Vitter and Tom Cotton introduced amendments to S. 1177, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization bill, that would withhold federal law enforcement funding for local jurisdictions, characterized as “sanctuary cities,” that limit interaction between federal immigration agencies and local law enforcement agencies in order to promote local public safety goals. Such amendments are substantively misguided and procedurally misplaced during consideration of education legislation. **NHLA recommends a “no” vote on the Vitter and Cotton amendments and will closely monitor any votes on them for inclusion in future NHLA scorecards evaluating Member support for the Latino community. NHLA similarly opposes these amendments should they be proposed to other legislation or brought before the Senate as stand-alone bills.**


Such amendments are a misguided response to the tragic murder of an innocent woman in San Francisco and are based on sweeping generalizations about all immigrants based on the actions of one individual. It is unacceptable when a presidential contender such as Donald Trump makes such generalizations in campaigning and equally unacceptable when U.S. Senators do so in legislating. No responsible public official should use this tragedy as a pretext for harsh and unproductive policies that only serve to satisfy the anti-immigrant impulses of certain politicians while doing nothing to improve public safety. The facts speak for themselves: study after study have shown that immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans, less likely to commit crimes, and less likely to be repeat offenders.

Though the case in San Francisco is tragic, no single occurrence should warrant such a wholesale change in policy, particularly with insufficient time to obtain all the facts and relevant policy considerations in relation to the case. Legislating based on scoring political points and ignoring the underlying problems of our immigration and criminal justice systems are not the solution. The federal government has tried harsh immigration removal policies in the recent past, including unconstitutional detainer requests, and failed to promote public

safety, instead tearing families apart by deporting individuals for minor nonviolent offenses and creating fear of authorities that undermined the cooperation that local law enforcement needs in order to protect the public. In order to effectively address problems with our broken immigration system, Congress should resume the effort started in the 113th Congress to enact immigration reform legislation.

We appreciate your attention to our concerns. Please contact NHLA through Andrea Senteno, of MALDEF, at asenteno@maldef.org or 202-572-0467 with any questions regarding this letter. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Saenz
MALDEF, President and General Counsel
NHLA Immigration Committee Co-Chair



Jose Calderón
Hispanic Federation, President
NHLA Immigration Committee Co-Chair