

# Comprehensive immigration reform a must

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The Standard-Times' four-day series on New Bedford's Central American immigrants highlights the need for comprehensive immigration reform, elected officials and immigrant advocates said Wednesday.

The New Immigrants series "is a stark reminder of our tragically broken immigration system and is further proof that we absolutely must work together to establish a comprehensive immigration policy for our country," U.S. Sen. John F. Kerry, D-Mass., said in a statement. "Comprehensive immigration reform would give many of the hard-working, taxpaying immigrants profiled in this series a legal path to citizenship."

Sen. Kerry said there is a need for an immigration system with "more sensible temporary worker programs to help fill our country's labor needs and smart, tough, humane enforcement of our laws."

The senator went on to say that it is "past the time for President Bush to fight for what he argues is a matter of conviction: strengthening our borders, fixing our visa backlog, and establishing a path to citizenship for the millions of immigrants who have lived here for years, played by the rules, and contributed to our economy and our communities.

"Thankfully in just a matter of months the White House will have a new occupant, and whomever that may be, I am confident that he will lead us forward to finally provide comprehensive immigration reform," Sen. Kerry said.

Melissa Wagoner, a spokeswoman for U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., said the series "eloquently describes the critical and long overdue need for comprehensive immigration reform."

"The current system is dysfunctional and unworkable and fails to serve either Americans or immigrants," she said in a statement. "We need fundamental reforms that are true to our tradition as a nation of immigrants and a nation that respects workers' rights."

The series, which ran Sunday through Wednesday, examined why Central Americans illegally immigrate to New Bedford; how they live, work and worship in this city; and what their prospects are for the future. Readers from around the country have reacted to the series with mixed opinions.

"We are more than generous with our legal immigration quotas," John Fredrickson of Norfolk, Neb., wrote in an e-mail to The Standard-Times. "Those who think they have a right to step in line ahead of those who wait for legal entry are scavengers and parasites on our system. Our system cannot and will not support this travesty much longer."

"Immigrants documented or not have better work ethics (than) any Americans," dremnd911 posted on the newspaper's Web site at [www.SouthCoastToday.com](http://www.SouthCoastToday.com). "No self identified 'American' would last 1 week working in a fish processing plant, this is why immigrants have always done those jobs, and then they turn around and cry about no jobs and money, there are plenty of jobs but there are not jobs that 'Americans' want to do."

Ken Pittman, the local talk radio host on WBSM-AM in Fairhaven, complimented The Standard-Times on an "outstanding piece of work." But he was quick to say that he would have liked the series to include stories profiling Americans in New Bedford who have suffered economic harm due to illegal immigrants.

"The equivalent of this coverage on Americans that are affected negatively by this issue, I think, would go a long way, not just to me, but to my audience," he said.

Corinn Williams, executive director of the Community Economic Development Center of Southeastern Massachusetts, said the series offers a "very compassionate depiction" of the city's Central American community. She noted, however, that one Guatemalan whom she spoke to about the series said he was anxious that it "might stir up additional resentment and anger" toward the new immigrants.

Anibal Lucas, executive director of the New Bedford advocacy group Maya K'iche, said the series was received favorably by most of the city's Guatemalan Mayans.

The Rev. Marc Fallon of Catholic Social Services, who ministers to the city's Central American immigrants, said the series was so comprehensive in telling the stories of the city's new immigrants that there are "no more excuses" for people "to mistreat them and to profoundly dehumanize them."

"That is over," he said. "These are real people. They have a real community and a real culture. ... We no longer accept them as a shadow population."

Eva Millona, acting executive director of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, called the series "one of the finest, in-depth investigations by a newspaper in the country on this issue." But she added that there "is still a need for journalists to investigate the role of powerful anti-immigrant organizations that are responsible for antagonistic rhetoric and polarization of this issue."

She also joined Sen. Kerry and Sen. Kennedy in calling for comprehensive immigration reform.

"The immigration system is outdated and in despair and needs to be reformed so the country can have a practical solution to solve the immediate problems and meet the real social and economic needs of the country," she said.