

Minute of Concern on TPS and Haitians in Springfield

Oberlin Friends Meeting (Quakers) is deeply concerned about adverse impacts on our neighbors in Springfield, Ohio, resulting from a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision.

The Court has now given the federal Administration authority to capture and deport, with no judicial review, residents under a provision of U.S. law called “Temporary Protected Status” (TPS.)

This humanitarian program, renewed by successive Administrations since 1990, has welcomed about 1.3 million refugees from 17 nations to escape devastation from earthquakes, armed conflict, epidemics, and other “extraordinary and temporary conditions.”

Up to now, over 330,000 persons have fled Haiti, escaping from death by earthquakes, gang violence, and collapse of essential government structures that protect its citizens. In Springfield’s population of about sixty thousand, over 10,000 of these are Haitians — who were given the legal status of TPS.

Whereas Springfield, Ohio, a “rustbelt” city had been shrinking for decades by industrial job loss, the arrival of Haitians who are eager to work has transformed it into one of America’s fastest-growing cities. New industries have been established and vacancies in many sectors are now being filled.

Haitian families have become involved in all aspects of the city’s life — economic, educational, cultural, athletic, industrial. They have established businesses and churches, bought houses, put down roots and raised families. Both Springfield’s Mayor and Ohio’s Governor testify that the new population is “Key to our revival.”

But the revocation of TPS for Haitian immigrants now means that they have lost their working permits and licenses to drive.

More tragically, the recent requirement that they all report to ICE to be fitted with GPS monitors shackled to their ankles has led to at least one suicide. We join in mourning the death on August 31st of Pierre Damas Bel. This 20-year-old Springfield honor student and athlete took his own life rather than endure the humiliation, taunting, and bullying that made him look like a criminal, although he had never even had a traffic ticket

Governor Mike DeWine has termed the Supreme Court's decision "a mistake" which could undo the spectacular progress that Springfield has made by reversing years of decline. He says it is "Bad for Ohio... a job killer... not good for our state."

We recognize the Governor's connection to Springfield as his hometown, and his awareness of Haitians' contribution to it. He and his wife have established a school in Haiti, with many contacts there from at least 20 trips. He is personally aware of the dangers in a country where it is "worse today than it's ever been."

Oberlin Friends Meeting commends the Governor for his insights and his compassionate leadership on these distressing issues.

The Administration wrongly claims that there is no longer a need to provide protection, and that conditions have improved enough for Haitians to return. However, the U.S. State Department has given Haiti the highest "Do not travel" warning for Americans, listing many life-endangering factors.

Some federal candidates and officials have spoken in starkly racist terms, including the manifestly false claim that Haitians were eating people's dogs and cats — a hate-filled slander originated by a white-supremacist campaign in recent years.

All of these developments lead us as a faith community to witness to our common humanity with these Springfield residents, and our desire to stand with them. We must uphold their Dignity as our siblings in the

Family of God. Their suffering can be profound, and we cannot look the other way.

We appeal to our elected officials — both state and federal — to intervene with the federal Administration. We urge that they ask for the TPS status to be restored. This will benefit the economy of Ohio. It will also stop what could become a humanitarian disaster for this population that has suffered and been endangered enough already.

Please join us in this concern.

*Approved as a Statement of Concern by Oberlin Friends Meeting
by action of Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business,
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