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For Immediate Release
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NEWS RELEASE

PIMA COUNTY DEMOCRATS CALL ON SINEMA TO WITHDRAW HER SUPPORT FOR “OPERATION SAFE RETURN” AND EMBRACE “DEMOCRATIC VALUES”

The Pima County Democratic Party has called on Senator Kyrsten Sinema to abandon a fast-track deportation proposal that jeopardizes the rights of immigrants and is inconsistent with the values of the Democratic Party. The Party’s opposition to the proposal was outlined in a resolution adopted on August 5, 2019 by the Party’s Executive Committee. A copy of the resolution was sent to Senator Sinema on August 7th.

The proposal, known as “Operation Safe Return,” would require undocumented immigrant families to submit to an interview with Border Patrol agents within one to three days of entry without legal counsel. Only the head of the household will be interviewed. Sinema, in a letter co-signed by eight other senators, describes the procedure as “detailed, fair and accurate interviews with the participants regarding their reasons for coming to the United States.” However, the proposed process could result in the family being immediately deported without due process. “Family member units that do not claim fear and therefore are not referred for a credible fear screening,” reads the letter that Sinema co-signed, “will be subject to immediate, expedited removal to their home country.” They will not be granted a “credible fear” interview to determine whether they are eligible to apply for asylum.

Currently, immigrants are allowed to apply for asylum if they articulate a credible fear of likely harm should they be returned to their home country. Credible fear interviews are conducted by asylum officers with U.S. Customs and Immigration Services. Sinema’s proposal would allow border patrol officers to cut off access to credible fear interviews, even though border patrol officers are trained to apprehend undocumented immigrants, not evaluate their eligibility for asylum. The policy would result in an erosion of immigrants’ rights, human rights abuses, and would do nothing to advance the causes of border safety and migration. As 65 organizations wrote the senators on July 17, 2019, “U.S. law requires that asylum-seeking families have a meaningful opportunity to request asylum, but this program would deny them of that.”

The Pima County Democratic Party calls on Senator Sinema to abandon the Operation Safe Return experiment and “work to help resolve the border detention crisis in a manner that comports with the Democratic values of solidarity, due process, and equal protection; and in a manner that comports with the obligations of the United States under Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1967.”

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