

Evangelicals seek to change the immigration narrative

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Evangelicals agree all people—including immigrants—should be treated with respect and mercy, but they hold divergent views on how that translates into public policy, an official with the National Association of Evangelicals said.

“The reason we have people lining up at the border is that we don’t have a functional legal system that admits a reasonable number of immigrants both for work and for family,” Galen Carey, vice president of government relations with the National Association of Evangelicals, told participants at the [Evangelical Convening on Immigration](#). The Evangelical Immigration Table sponsored the Nov. 17 event in Houston.

Carey participated in a panel along with Phillip Connor, senior demographer at FWD.us, an advocacy group focused on immigration and criminal justice reform; Hannah Daniel, policy manager with the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission; and Kathryn Freeman, Texas advocacy strategist for World Relief Texas. Eric Black, editor and publisher of the *Baptist Standard*, moderated the discussion.

Expand public officials’ ‘field of vision’



Kathryn Freeman

Freeman, former public policy director for Texas Baptists' Christian Life Commission, encouraged Christians to help elected officials expand their "field of vision" in regard to what their evangelical constituents really believe about immigration.

"I think there's a narrative of who the voters are that gets stuck in their head and in their imagination, and so, they think they're in step with their constituents," she said.

She pointed to a [Lifeway Research](#) study showing significantly larger percentages of Americans who are "evangelical by belief," as opposed to "self-identified evangelicals," support immigration policies that promote family unity and provide immigrants a pathway to citizenship.

Daniel noted messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention 2023 annual meeting in New Orleans [approved a resolution](#) urging government leaders to "provide robust avenues for asylum claimants" and to "create legal pathways for permanent status for immigrants who are in our communities by no fault of their own, prioritizing the unity of families." The resolution condemned "any form of nativism, mistreatment or exploitation" as "inconsistent with the gospel."

Several panelists encouraged evangelicals to encourage lawmakers to support the bipartisan [Dignity Act](#) of 2023, HR 3599.

The Dignity Act seeks to strengthen border security, while also providing undocumented individuals—particularly DACA recipients and Temporary Protected Status holders—a path to pursue legal status.

Michael DeBruhl, a retired Border Patrol official who now directs the Casa del Sagrado Corazon shelter in El Paso, noted the border security system was created to process Mexican nationals entering the United States

illegally, and it was “woefully unprepared” for a massive influx of refugees and asylum seekers from other countries.

Mexican nationals who entered the United States without documentation and who were apprehended by Border Patrol 20 years ago largely went unseen by the general public, he noted. Today, those who are seeking refugee status, asylum or humanitarian parole are in the public eye.

“Now we see that population. They are visible to us,” he said.

DeBruhl participated in a panel along with Julie Mirlicourtois, executive producer of the [Maybe God podcast](#) and [ACROSS](#), a documentary film series about asylum seekers; and Yonathan Moya, founding executive director of Border Perspectives.

“Nations from all over the world are coming to the southern border” of the United States, Moya said.