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Migration
Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, meets with Vice President Kamala Harris in El Paso June

Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, meets with Vice President Kamala Harris in El Paso June 25, 2021, during her first trip to the border as vice president to talk about immigration. Harris traveled to a border point of entry and met with faith groups and nonprofits to learn about the reasons that force migrants from Central America and Mexico to leave their home countries to come to the U.S. (CNS photo/courtesy Hope Border Institute)



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News reports say the Biden administration may not roll back at the end of July a policy that keeps migrants out of the country, citing health measures given the rising number of coronavirus cases in the U.S.

Immigrant advocates were already pressuring the Biden administration to end what's known as Title 42 of the Public Health Safety Act, a policy the Trump administration began using in March 2020 as knowledge of rising infections of the coronavirus began to surge in the U.S. — and around the world.

Advocates said they'd been hearing reports that it would soon change, at least for some, and parents migrating with children would not be subject to the rule by the end of July, a first step in lifting the restrictions altogether.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection said the policy was needed to keep people out on the Mexico and Canada borders "in the interest of public health." Border Patrol agents were instructed to expel anyone caught trying to illegally enter the U.S. instead of processing them under existing immigration law. That policy has remained under the Biden administration with some exceptions made.

But news outlets CNN and NBC News reported that sources in the administration have said that plan is now "in flux" and part of the reason may be the rising number of COVID-19 infections driven by the Delta variant of the coronavirus.

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Currently, children are the only ones not subject to the rule, but immigrant advocates say that by extending the policy and keeping out others, the Biden administration puts people who already have been victimized in a dangerous situation.

NBC News reported July 20 that a White House official had said the administration would continue to defer to public health authorities and didn't have a date to end Title 42.

Dr. Michele Heisler, a representative from a group of health care professionals, said in early July that the policy "made no sense" when it was first instituted by the Trump administration and makes no sense now under Biden.

Heisler, medical director for Physicians for Human Rights, took part in a letter sent in early July to Secretary Xavier Becerra of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control director, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, calling on the administration to rescind the policy.

Catholic bishops and organizations affiliated with the church also have called for an end to the policy since it was put in place.

On June 24, Washington Auxiliary Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville, chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' migration committee, called on the government to end "the misuse of Title 42 to turn away vulnerable asylum-seekers."

Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso Texas, told Vice President Kamala Harris, during her June 25 visit to the border city, to "hear the voices of those turned away at the border under Title 42."

"Their tears should shock our national conscience," the bishop told the vice president. "We must restore the right to asylum at the border with a plan to receive asylum-seekers worthy of our country's highest ideals and commitments."