News

A woman in Nogales, Mexico, holds a sign Nov. 8, 2021, that reads, "No Title 42 Biden ¡Cump

A woman in Nogales, Mexico, holds a sign Nov. 8, 2021, that reads, "No Title 42 Biden ¡Cumple!" at a migrant-led protest against enforcement of the U.S. health code's Title 42 provision, which is being used to keep many migrants out because of concerns about coronavirus. (CNS photo/Caitlin O'Hara, Reuters)



Rhina Guidos

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WASHINGTON — Two years after the implementation of a public health rule limiting who enters the U.S. at its borders, Catholic immigration advocates keep calling out the Biden administration for continuing it and they are demanding its demise.

Title 42 of the Public Health Safety Act is 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.

Of Title 42, U.S. Customs and Border Protection says on its website that the "prohibition on the introduction of persons or property, in whole or in part, from Mexico and Canada is required in the interest of public health."

Border Patrol agents have been instructed to expel anyone caught trying to illegally enter the U.S. instead of processing them under existing immigration law.

The order, the agency says, prohibits "the entry of certain persons who potentially pose a health risk, either by virtue of being subject to previously announced travel restrictions or because they unlawfully entered the country to bypass health screening measures."

But with a dwindling number of infections and lifting of mask mandates around the country, advocates said keeping the rule in place has nothing to do with health concerns, but with more nefarious motives.

"While we watch much of the nation remove their masks at the public health guidance of this administration, we simultaneously watch the same administration continue to expel vulnerable people back to harm for the supposed protection of public health. We will not stay silent in the face of such hypocrisy," said Anna Gallagher, executive director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc., known as CLINIC, in a March 21 news release.

Biden administration officials have said Title 42 is not an immigration policy, but a health measure guided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. On March 12, just days before the second year of Title 42's implementation, the CDC said it was ending the measure for unaccompanied minors but not for adults.

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"It is shameful that we have reached this anniversary," Gallagher said. "Science has told us, over and over, that Title 42 is not justified. Now that the CDC announced it will no longer be blocking unaccompanied children under the order, the lack of justification is even more glaring. If migrant children are not a threat to public health, then neither are migrant families or adults."

Gallagher called the measure "harmful, racist, xenophobic and outright sinful."

On March 21, several Catholic groups gathered outside the CDC offices in Washington to demonstrate against Title 42.

"As people of faith, we are called to love our neighbor without distinction. Title 42 dishonors the dignity of migrants and violates the internationally recognized right to seek asylum. President (Joe) Biden must act in accordance with his Catholic faith and end the racist Title 42 policy before more people are subject to violence and persecution," said Mary J. Novak, executive director of Network, a Catholic social justice lobby.

"Two years is too long for Title 42. Immigration advocates and the faith community do not tolerate the CDC's and President Biden's complicity in rationalizing and legitimizing this harmful, racist policy," said Ronnate Asirwatham, Network's government relations director. "This policy was designed to negatively impact asylum-seekers and migrants, especially Black and brown migrants. We must restore asylum and end this harmful policy at once."

Recently, a Ukrainian family who flew from Europe to Mexico City and headed north seeking refuge at the southern border of the U.S. was turned away several times. However, they were eventually allowed in after an outcry.

Some news agencies have reported their sources are saying the policy could end in April.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said March 22 that if Title 42 is lifted, it "would take our border from its current state of chaos into a whole new level of utter, utter meltdown."

The chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration also has spoken out against the use of Title 42, and a group of Catholic women religious who protested Title 42 outside the White House in December called the rule "immoral."