



Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles

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Contact: Alvaro Huerta, CHIRLA, 213.353.1789
213.210.6735, ahuerta@chirla.org

“We Need Immigration Reform, *Fast!*” Students Caravan from Santa Ana to Pasadena, Continue Statewide Fast for Immigration Reform

Los Angeles, CA – As students, youth, parents and supporters move into their second day of fasting, spirits remain high and participants remain firm in their resolve to send Congress the message that the status quo on immigration is unacceptable. Today, students rallied outside of Congressman Adam Schiff’s office in Pasadena, displaying colorful banners, wearing graduation gowns, and chanting in solidarity.

Thus far, 24 students and one parent have abstained from eating for the first 24 hours of a week-long fast, consuming only water and juices. Dozens of others have pledged their support for the fasters by committing to fast for one or more days in solidarity. Participants of the fast have chosen to deny themselves food in order to urge the California congressional delegation to move forward immigration reform that includes legal residency and a path to citizenship for hundreds of thousands of undocumented youth.

"There is a lot of energy. When your heart is into something you really want, your body can keep going. Our hunger for food is bad, but our hunger for justice is worse," said Berenice B., a fifteen-year-old student at Woodrow Wilson High School who is participating in the fast for a full week.

Among the twelve million undocumented people currently residing in the U.S., it is estimated that approximately 2 million are children. Over 65,000 talented, undocumented youth graduate from high school and college each year with little hope of attaining higher education or a job once out of school. With the immigration reform debate stalling in the Senate last week, students are urging members of the House of Representatives to show courage by introducing a new bill that could renew momentum for reform.

"The word is getting around the community. We are doing something really positive. I am normally used to eating every three hours - five meals a day - which means I should be on my 3rd meal by now," shared Paola Fernandez, a junior at CSU Bakersfield, "But I feel good about this, especially that we are doing this all together," she adds.

Students and youth are also paying close attention to the closely related DREAM Act, a bill which would allow undocumented students who meet certain requirements to obtain legal residency. The DREAM Act has been stalled for years by politics, though it remains widely supported by many members of Congress on both sides of the aisle.

"It makes absolutely no sense that we would deny these students access to their dreams," said Maria Rodriguez, a youth organizer with the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, or CHIRLA. "We are talking about students attending UCLA, Harvard, and dozens of other great schools. These youngsters are as American as apple pie, and desperately want to get an education, enter the workforce, and give back to their communities," she adds.

California is an especially critical state within the immigration debate given the size of its immigrant population and key Congressional leaders who represent the state. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, more than one fourth of all Californians are foreign-born. This is equivalent to 9.4 million people, though actual numbers are probably much higher. When the children of immigrants are added, immigrants and their children account for almost half of the state’s population.

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The fast will continue outside of Congress Member Adam Schiff's district offices in Pasadena all day today. The caravan will then head out to Bakersfield, San Jose, and end in San Francisco where participants will join another dozen fasters outside of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's office on July 6th.

For more information, please visit the fast website at www.chirla.org/fast.

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