



Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles

For Immediate Release

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“We Need Immigration Reform, *Fast!*”

Students Break Bread after Over 170 Hours of Statewide Fast for Immigration Reform

San Francisco, CA – Students from across California are ending a week-long fast that started last Monday, July 2nd, and reached across the state, with students caravanning from Santa Ana to San Francisco. Wearing caps and gowns, participants broke bread in front of San Francisco’s City Hall at a ceremony highlighting the emotional and physical sacrifices that these young adults are willing to make in order to achieve justice for their families. The ceremony was presided over by local religious leaders and the students were joined by representatives of Congress Member Mike Honda (CA-15) and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.

Participants of the fast did not eat food for 174 hours.

"Not eating for a full week was a very difficult thing to do," said Miriam G., a junior at UC Davis who is participating in the fast for a full week. "The third day was the most challenging, but I knew that I had to go on so that Congress will listen to our stories. Our families and our dreams can't wait any longer for immigration reform," she adds.

All together, 24 students and one parent abstained from eating for a full week, consuming only water and juices to remain hydrated. Dozens of others across the state fasted for one or more days in a show of solidarity and organizers were even contacted by people in Texas who wanted to participate in the fast themselves. Participants urged 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. During their week-long caravan up the state, they pitched makeshift tents outside of the offices of Congress Members Loretta Sanchez, Adam Schiff, Zoe Lofgren, and Speaker Pelosi – key legislators whose leadership will be necessary for an immigration bill to move in the House of Representatives.

Fasting has long been a used as a tool for both protest and spiritual realization. Prominent historical icons have abstained from eating to rally support for political independence for whole countries and for the advancement of civil rights, including Mohatma Ghandi and Cesar Chavez.

“Though my health has deteriorated during this fast, I am very proud to go hungry for something that I believe in very deeply,” shared Sergio D., a student at Belmont High School in Los Angeles. “We all deserve a chance to succeed and to give back. That is all that we are asking for,” he added.

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, students urged members of the House of Representatives to show courage by introducing a new bill that could renew momentum for reform.

"The status quo is unacceptable," shared Antonia Rivera, a student from Orange County. "We cannot let Congress off the hook. Our immigration system is still broken and Congress needs to fix it right away," she asserted.

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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. Though it remains widely supported by many members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, the DREAM Act has been stalled by politics for years.

"Our broken immigration system is not going to fix itself," stated Angelica Salas, executive director of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, or CHIRLA. "Our elected leaders cannot simply pass the buck and bury their heads in the sand. They need to show that they have the courage to pass just and humane immigration reform this year," she adds.

Today's ceremony marked the culmination of a variety of activities that took place in the cities of Santa Ana, Pasadena, Bakersfield, San Jose, and San Francisco, including rallies, marches and a mock graduation with students garbed in cap and gown.

Joel, a student at UC Berkeley affirmed, "We may not get immigration reform today or even tomorrow, but we won't give up until people realize that we are human beings too, and we have dreams that we are willing to go hungry for, just like everyone else."

For more information, updates, pictures and video, please visit the fast website at www.chirla.org/fast.

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