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## **New Mexico Immigrant Groups Kick Off Series of Actions to Call on Congress and the President to Pass Legalization for Undocumented Essential Workers**

Santa Fe, New Mexico – On Thursday, New Mexico-based immigrant groups kicked off a statewide week of action with a rally in front of the capitol building demanding Congress and the President deliver legalization with permanent protections against deportation for undocumented essential workers through the budget reconciliation package. *Somos Un Pueblo Unido*, EL CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos, and NM CAFé are convenors of the series of actions.

At the Santa Fe event, dozens of immigrant essential workers whose families would benefit from legalization were joined by U.S. Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez, Santa Fe's mayor, city councilors, county commissioners, state legislators, and faith leaders.

The rally was part of a nationwide push for congressional leaders and the President to secure legalization, a once-in-a-decade opportunity for Democrats, despite recommendations by the U.S. Senate Parliamentarian, an unelected staff attorney advising the Senate, on whether it should be done through the budget reconciliation process. Several advocates and legal scholars across the country have emphasized that even as Senate leaders continue to present her with various legalization options, her opinion is non-binding, and ultimately Congress will decide what to include in the infrastructure package.

“We can’t *build back better* without immigrants. So when is the time to get immigration done? The time is now!” said Congresswoman Leger Fernandez at the rally. “When you listen to the communities you serve, you won’t let any roadblock--or any recommendation by the parliamentarian--stop you in pursuing a more just and equitable society.”

“Even though my husband and I have worked and paid our taxes in New Mexico for many years as landscapers and small business owners, we were excluded from unemployment benefits and federal economic relief because of our immigration status.” Lucero España, a member of *Somos Un Pueblo Unido*'s United Worker Center who gave birth to a baby girl during the pandemic, said. “The pandemic was hard on everyone, but it was disproportionately hard on families like mine. To this day we are still struggling. Something has to change. We demand it!”

Mayor Alan Webber added: “The Senate Parliamentarian doesn’t seem to understand there are millions of lives at stake. It doesn’t matter. Congress needs to get it done anyway.”

In a statement read by field representative Eric Castillo at the event, U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich said:

“New Mexico would not be the vibrant community it is without immigrants. That’s why I am calling for a pathway to citizenship to be included in President’s Biden’s Build Back Better Plan. Like you, I am disappointed in the recent roadblocks we’ve faced in this effort, but I am not defeated. Delivering a pathway to citizenship and lasting protections for immigrants is critical to America’s success.”

Community members and local elected leaders also called for a path to citizenship as a means to ensuring the health and wellbeing of tens of thousands of immigrant families and inclusive economic recovery for local economies.

Santa Fe City Councilor Renee Villarreal said: “Immigrant essential workers are the heart and soul of Santa Fe’s economy. We cannot get a fair recovery without supporting undocumented immigrants and providing a path to citizenship.”

On Friday, EL CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos held a press conference on Civic Plaza in Albuquerque with Mayor Tim Keller, Senator Linda Lopez, Bernalillo County Commissioner Barboa, essential workers, U.S. Congresswoman Melanie Stansbury, and staffers from both Senators Heinrich and Lujan’s offices.

“The health, safety, and well-being of our undocumented families is vital to the social and economic well-being and recovery of our state,” said U.S. Congresswoman Melanie Stansbury. “That’s why we must include a pathway to citizenship in the Build Back Better Act. Throughout the pandemic members of our immigrant community have been on the front lines keeping our communities safe and keeping our economy running. Immigration reform is essential to building a future that is more just, equitable, and sustainable for New Mexico and our nation. Now is the time to get it done.”

“Undocumented, essential workers are part of the fabric of our community. It’s past time we recognize them with appropriate, accessible pathways to legal citizenship,” said Mayor Tim Keller. “We know that they make our city stronger, and we will continue to advocate on their behalf for the opportunity and support they deserve.”

“We are proud that we have always been essential workers and that we are part of the workforce that helps power New Mexico's economy. We will never stop fighting and it is important that we have leaders in Washington who also fight for the legalization of our essential workers and their families,” said Lucy Hernandez, one of three essential workers and members of El CENTRO who spoke out. “After Trump's political games, we deserve that the hope brought by the Biden administration is translated into action and concrete deeds, and that we have a sure path to citizenship.”

Commissioner Barboa stated, “I proudly join the nearly 100 New Mexico local elected officials who signed onto a letter calling on Congress and the President to get it done through reconciliation because we understand immigrant workers are essential to key New Mexico industries and because it is the moral thing to do. We can not have a full economic recovery from COVID in this nation if we simultaneously continue to exclude a large segment of workers and families.”

These events will be followed by several others across the state in Gallup, Farmington, Hobbs, Roswell and Deming. For list of events, click here: <https://bit.ly/NMRallies>