

# C-U IMMIGRATION FORUM

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## **Who Are We**

The Champaign-Urbana Immigration Forum is a group of immigrants, students, clergy, service providers, labor union representatives, residents and community organizations concerned about the progress and plight of immigrants in the Champaign County community (Central Illinois). The C-U Immigration Forum meets regularly to discuss immigration-related issues and events in our community and works to:

- celebrate the diversity and culture that immigrants contribute to our community;
- educate the public about issues that affect local immigrant communities;
- advocate for the rights of immigrants and encourage their full participation in civic, cultural, social and political life in our community;
- promote permanent and positive changes that will improve the quality of life for immigrants in our community; and
- organize for policies that lead to just and humane treatment to all immigrants that are part of our community.

## **What Are Our Concerns**

- Our nation has a proud and long tradition of welcoming immigrants from around the world as symbolized by the Statue of Liberty. But too often, bigotry and discrimination against new immigrants has been a common response. The C-U Immigration Forum rejects such attitudes and works to celebrate the diversity and contributions of all immigrants in our community.
- Around 11 million undocumented immigrants are living and working within U.S. borders without a realistic path to citizenship. Our government's focus on enforcement-only policies has not substantially reduced that number, but has led to the tearing apart of families, human rights abuses, racial profiling, and even death.
- A related issue is that 65,000 undocumented students graduate every year from high school without "papers." These are young people born outside of the United States who were educated in American schools, hold American values, know only the U.S. as home and who, upon high school graduation, find the door to their future slammed shut. Access to post high-school education is for them difficult if not impossible. This is a waste to all concerned – students, their families, the community at large.

## **What Are We Doing About It**

- In response to the needs of immigrants, the Forum collaborates with local churches as well as organizations such as the Illinois Coalition of Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) to promote programs and policies that benefit immigrants in our community as well as activities such as screening/discussion of documentary films on immigration issues, worship services, legislative updates, and direct assistance to immigrants.
- In solidarity with the U of I Registered Student Organization, *La Colectiva*, Immigration Forum members have lobbied in support of the DREAM Act on a state and national level to create a path to citizenship for students who graduate from college or serve in the U.S. military.
- The C-U Immigration Forum has worked to reverse the negative impacts of the controversial federal deportation program called "Secure Communities" which was promoted as a way to identify and deport dangerous criminals "who pose a threat to public safety, such as aliens with prior convictions for major drug offenses, murder, rape, robbery, and kidnapping." However according to the federal government's own data the vast majority of individuals detained under the program were non - criminals. Here in Champaign County 70% of those detained had no criminal record, but the impact on local families has been devastating.
- The Forum has conducted a number of events to reach out to local immigrant communities from sponsoring consulate visits to help local immigrants obtain passports and other documents to organizing "Know Your Rights" workshops to educate local immigrants about programs such as Secure Communities and their rights under the law.