

September 17, 2012

The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Department of Homeland Security
Washington DC 20528

Dear Secretary Napolitano,

In conjunction with the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice and affected communities across the Gulf Coast, we urge DHS to enact permanent, written guidance to ensure that immigration enforcement threats do not block immigrant families from humanitarian access during natural disasters, health pandemics, or other threats to our safety.

We have seen in recent disasters that many immigrants are afraid to come forward to receive assistance when disasters strike. Many immigrants are fearful of evacuating in the first place, worried that doing so will put them or their family members at risk of immigration enforcement.

While DHS ultimately did issue assurances related to the Hurricane Isaac disaster zone, this interim measure is insufficient. We support requests by affected communities that DHS now issue permanent written policy guidance that ensures no family is blocked from humanitarian access to state and federal resources during natural and man-made disasters. When a hurricane or other natural disaster or other threat to safety looms, communities should be able to rely on a clear, permanent DHS policy to plan the safest course of action.

A permanent DHS policy would facilitate necessary emergency planning by families and communities and create opportunities for appropriate training of DHS staff.

Components of a permanent DHS policy that applies to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and local law enforcement entities enforcing immigration law should include the following:

- Limit immigration enforcement actions and checkpoints across all aspects of disaster relief including evacuation, sheltering, return, and recovery and reconstruction;
- Direct that a pre-existing immigration detainer must not affect a detainee's ability to participate in local law enforcement's release and/or transfer programs; and
- Ensure that information provided to FEMA will not be shared with enforcement personnel or used in immigration enforcement actions.

With a policy directive in hand, community organizations, neighborhood committees, advocacy organizations, social service providers, and others across the region can join the effort to educate community members and reassure the populace that evacuation and rescue efforts can proceed in a safe and orderly manner.

Sincerely,

ASISTA Immigration Assistance
ADC Michigan
Allies of Knoxville's Immigrant Neighbors (AKIN)
America's Voice
American Civil Liberties Union
American Immigration Council
American Immigration Lawyer's Association (AILA)
Americans for Immigrant Justice
Artemis Justice Center
Asian American Justice Center
Asian Pacific American Legal Center, a member of the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs
Brandworkers
Break the Chain at the Institute for Policy Studies
CAAAY Organizing Asian Communities from New York
Center for New Community
Central Florida Jobs with Justice
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA)
Farmworker Association of Florida, Inc.
Farmworker Justice
Florida Coastal Immigrant Rights Clinic
Food Chain Workers' Alliance
Franciscan Action Network
Freedom University
Fuerza Latina
Georgia Rural Urban Summit
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Immigrant Defense Project
Interfaith Worker Justice- New Orleans
International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT DC 80) District Council 80 New Orleans, LA
Jesuit Social Research Institute/Loyola University New Orleans
Jobs with Justice
Kentucky Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Lana'I Domestic Violence, Women Helping Women
Latino Union of Chicago
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
Mennonite Central Committee--New Orleans
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
Michigan Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Missouri Immigrant and Refugee Advocates
NALEO Educational Fund
National Council of La Raza
National Day Labor Organizing Network

National Employment Law Project
National Guestworker Alliance
National Immigration Forum
National Immigration Law Center
National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Network, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Northwest Immigrants Rights Project
Olneyville Neighborhood Association
Peretta Law Office
Puentes New Orleans
Refugio del Rio Grande
Restaurant Opportunities Center, New Orleans
Rights Working Group
San Francisco Living Wage Coalition
South Asian Americans Leading Together
Southern Poverty Law Center
Sugar Law Center for Economic and Social Justice
Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition
The Restoration Project at Casa Mariposa
Unidad Latina en Accion NJ
Unitarian Universalist Associations of Congregations
Unite HERE Local 2262
United Worker Congress
Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association of New Orleans
Voces de la Frontera
Washtenaw Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights
WeCount!
Worker Justice Center of New York
Youth Organizers United