

KENOSHA NEWS

State immigrant-rights coalition to participate in national campaign

Local activists join others from across U.S. seeking immigration law reforms

BY TERRY FLORES tflores@kenoshanews.com

A statewide coalition of immigrant-rights advocates is joining a national campaign Wednesday in Washington, D.C., to call for comprehensive reform of U.S. immigration laws.

Representatives of more than 700 organizations from around the nation will take part in the Immigration for America Campaign to present a blueprint for reform, especially that which would give many illegal immigrants a path to legal residency and citizenship, and one they hope President Barack Obama will consider.

Obama has said while reform is a priority for his administration, the economy comes first. He has made clear, however, that he wants to begin the dialogue on overhauling immigration laws and plans to convene work groups to discuss the issue over the summer months. More serious work for passing such legislation would likely come next year.

State coalition member Sister Barbara Pfarr, a Kenosha native and executive director of a state interfaith organization working for social justice, said the campaign involves diverse interests presenting a united front for reform.

“We’re all working together this time,” said Pfarr, who leads the Milwaukee Innerscity Congregations Allied for Hope/WISDOM Inc. “I think there is a new momentum for immigration reform in that the president is interested in moving it along.”

The statewide coalition also includes Voces de la Frontera, which also serves Kenosha, and other organizations from La Crosse to Racine.

Pfarr said the coalition supports the national campaign for more family and work visas to be issued and a pathway to citizenship. It has been estimated that about 12 million illegal immigrants currently live and work in the United States.

“We want more visas for people to come and a path to citizenship for those that are here, at least make them be documented so they cannot be exploited,” Pfarr said.

Christine Neumann-Ortiz, president of Voces de la Frontera, said this week’s summit in the nation’s capital is aimed at delivering a more urgent message to Obama and Congress.

“The message (is) that we can’t wait. We need to pass immigration reform this year, and we want the House (of Representatives) to introduce the legislation first,” she said. “We want Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the House, to provide strong leadership because we don’t want what happened in 2007 to happen, where we had a poorly construed bill.”

The 2007 version included a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants while securing the country’s borders. A compromise also included provisions for unauthorized residents to pay a fine and learn English, and it created a guestworker category of visa. The bill was never voted on.

© Copyright Kenosha News.