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## **Rallying for rights, immigration reforms**

### **Thousands oppose federal crackdown on workers with Social Security number issues**

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Thousands gathered on an expansive, grassy hillside at Mitchell Park on the city's south side Wednesday to rally against measures designed to crack down on illegal immigrants and employers who hire them.

Milwaukee's rally was part of National Day of Action, which took place in more than 15 cities across the country. It was sparked, in part, by a series of new initiatives announced last month by the Department of Homeland Security designed to crack down on illegal immigrants and their employers.

Many participants carried signs that read "Immigrant Workers Essential Workers," "We Make America Stronger" and "Legalize Don't Criminalize."

At the main podium a large red sign read: "Back off Bush SS Numbers," a reference to an announcement by Homeland Security last month that employers who receive Social Security "no match" letters for their employees will be required to take action, such as verifying the workers' names and numbers or firing them. In the past, employers were not required to do anything when they received no match letters.

The get-tough stance came after Congress failed to enact immigration reform legislation.

Many groups that have complained loudly about illegal immigration, such as the Federation for American Immigration Reform, applauded the new sanctions.

But a federal judge has issued a temporary order blocking the "no match" rule until an Oct. 1 hearing.

"We want to send the message, like other cities are doing, that we want the new rule stopped," said Christine Neumann-Ortiz, founder and director of Voces de la Frontera, a worker and immigrant rights group that organized the event. "It would create social and economic crisis for millions of workers, documented and undocumented."

"All workers must speak up with one voice and say no to Social Security match," said Douglas Drake, organizing coordinator for the United Steelworkers union.

State Rep. Pedro Colón (D-Milwaukee) and city Ald. James Witkowiak also addressed the crowd, which Neumann-Ortiz estimated at 8,000 to 10,000, based on traffic flow and sign-up sheets. Sheriff's deputies in the park did not estimate the crowd size.

Neumann-Ortiz said Voces is setting up a "rapid response" team of volunteers to assist families and workers who might run into problems as a result of stepped-up immigration enforcement.

Isauro Blas, 41, signed up to work on the rapid response team. A construction worker, he said he took a vacation day to attend the rally because "we all have to lend our support."

"I'm an immigrant and we are all paisanos," he said. "I want to help families who are here."

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