IN THE NEWS

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IN THE NEWS

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3-Day Fast Is Latest Call to Overhaul Immigration

By KIRK SEMPLE  
June 2, 2010

With the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island as a backdrop, more than 40 people, including several New York politicians and clergy members, gathered in Battery Park on Wednesday to start a three-day fast to press for a comprehensive immigration overhaul.

The protest is the latest in a wave of demonstrations by immigrants and their advocates in the New York region and around the country that have included rallies, vigils, marches and acts of civil disobedience. Most of them have been meant to express impatience with the Obama administration and Congress for postponing long-discussed change to the nation’s immigration system.

In three separate protests over the past three weeks, a total of 109 activists have been arrested for blocking traffic in front of Federal Plaza in Lower Manhattan, where the government’s immigration agencies have their New York offices.

“What you’re seeing is definitely a pivot in the way that immigrants are expressing their anger,” said Chung-Wha Hong, executive director of the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella advocacy group. “Immigrants feel they have to express their anger and their demand for justice in more dramatic ways than in the past.”

After a morning news conference in Battery Park, many of the fasters took a ferry to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Most intend to spend the remainder of the fast at Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village. Among them was Adela Valdez**, 39, an illegal immigrant from Mexico and a community activist, who said that fasting was just one of many tools that demonstrators have to employ to compel lawmakers to take action.

“We have to use all our resources,” she said.

On May 10, Oswaldo Cabrera, an Ecuadorean immigrant, began a hunger strike at a Lutheran church in East Harlem to push for changes to the immigration system and to protest a new law in Arizona that gives police departments broad power to make immigration checks. Mr. Cabrera has since shifted his fast to a church in Fairview, N.J., and he plans to travel to Washington at the end of the month to continue his campaign.

On Tuesday, a group of 10 young illegal immigrants, several of them students, began a hunger strike on the sidewalk outside the offices of Senator Charles E. Schumer in Midtown Manhattan. They are pressing Congress to pass the Dream Act, a bill that would offer legal status to illegal immigrant students who were brought to the United States as children. And they are focusing their effort on Mr. Schumer, who as chairman of a Senate subcommittee on immigration wields large influence over the passage of such legislation.

On Wednesday afternoon, the protesters were sitting on blankets near the intersection of 47th Street and Third Avenue. Asked how long they intended to continue their strike, Gabriel Martinez, 27, who recently graduated from John Jay College of Criminal Justice and was serving as the group’s spokesman, said, “As long as we can hold.”

Division among lawmakers in Washington has stymied the Dream Act, with some arguing that it should be handled as part of more comprehensive legislation and others saying that it can be dealt with separately.

While the calls for an immigration overhaul have been building for several years, they have accelerated since the passage of the Arizona law in April. Related demonstrations have included an increasing number of illegal immigrants who have shown the willingness to risk arrest and deportation by presenting themselves publicly.

On May 17, five immigrants held a sit-in at the Tucson offices of Senator John McCain, calling on him to support the Dream Act. Four were arrested on misdemeanor trespassing charges; three of them were in the country illegally and were expected to face deportation proceedings. Other civil disobedience has taken place in Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington.

On Tuesday, in the third protest in a weekly series, 56 people were arrested in front of Federal Plaza after they linked arms, stepped into the middle of Broadway and brought traffic to a halt.

Though none of those arrested were illegal immigrants, organizers said, some demonstrators who were on the sidewalk supporting the action wore red-and-white buttons that read, “I’m an illegal immigrant.”

**Member of Make the Road New York
Lead Poisoning, a Stubborn Nemesis

April 21, 2010
By MIREYA NAVARRO

Nothing prepared Veronica Rodriguez** for the call she got from a New York City health official last October.

A blood sample taken from her 2 1/2-year-old son, Carlos Espinoza, had revealed more than double the level of lead that the federal government considers cause for concern about poisoning.

“I was horrified,” said Ms. Rodriguez, 26, who lives on Staten Island and vaguely recalls having heard routine prevention messages about the dangers of lead in the home. “I thought, oh my God, my boy is very sick.”

Lead poisoning among young children, which can cause learning and behavior problems, has decreased so sharply in recent decades that it is tempting to consider it a problem of the past. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was so confident about the decline in childhood lead poisoning that it set a goal of 2010 for eliminating it.

But federal health officials now say eradication may still be years away because hazards remain in often poor urban pockets — mostly from old, badly maintained housing with lead-based paint.

If the remaining cases are to be tackled effectively, local laws must be strengthened and enforcement increased, experts say.

“We have to get serious about doing these things,” said Dr. Mary Jean Brown, chief of the lead poisoning prevention branch at the C.D.C.

Many jurisdictions still do not have lead hazard laws, which require landlords to check for exposed lead-based paint if children are living in the home, Dr. Brown said. And even in New York City, which passed a comprehensive law in 2004, compliance is spotty.

A survey of 120 tenants in Bushwick, Brooklyn — among the neighborhoods with high lead levels in children — found “rampant noncompliance” among landlords from 2007 to 2009. In the survey, by the community groups Make the Road New York and the New York City Coalition to End Lead Poisoning, 59 percent of tenants reported that their landlords had not followed any of the law’s provisions.

An earlier wave of increased testing and tougher legislation, including bans on lead-based paint in the 1970s and on leaded gasoline in the 1990s, resulted in sharp declines in poisoning cases in the most vulnerable population, children younger than 6. In 2006, an estimated 120,000 children under 6 tested positive for elevated lead levels nationwide, according to the C.D.C., down from 434,000 in 2000 and 890,000 in 1994.

New York City’s rates of lead poisoning mirror the national trend, with 1,572 cases among children tested in 2008, compared with 20,000 in 1995.

After more than two decades of delays, the Environmental Protection Agency will put a regulation in effecton Thursday that requires renovation and remodeling contractors to be certified in techniques for containing lead dust stirred up during work. The rule, which contractors say could increase the cost of renovation projects by hundreds of dollars, applies to homes and buildings housing children that were constructed before lead paint was banned in 1978.

In New York, a task force convened last summer by Gov. David A. Paterson is also exploring ways to incorporate lead inspections into requirements for building permits and state assistance, like money for weatherization projects. The task force is to issue its report in November.

“At this point, it’s really trying to identify opportunities to try to get ahead of the problem,” said Wendy Saunders, the state’s deputy secretary for health, Medicaid and oversight, who is vice chairwoman of the task force.
But the invisible threat persists in the city’s so-called lead belts — areas of Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island where the rates of children showing elevated levels are routinely the highest in the city.

Last summer, E.P.A. officials took hundreds of soil samples near a long-closed lead factory on Staten Island suspected in the chronically higher rates of lead poisoning among children in the North Shore neighborhoods of Port Richmond, Stapleton and St. George. The area was once filled with heavy industry, and lead contamination can be found in parks and industrial sites.

Of the children tested from those neighborhoods, about 7 out of 1,000 had elevated lead levels, health department data show, compared with a citywide average of 4.5 out of 1,000.

But when the soil sampling results came in last month, the lead contamination found in six residential blocks was traced to peeling paint, not the plant. The samples contained an average lead concentration of 549 parts per million, well above the threshold of 400 parts per million that the E.P.A. says is a health risk in residential areas for children.

Walter Mugdan, the E.P.A.’s regional Superfund director, said that the paint had contaminated backyard soil that could also harbor traces of leaded gasoline. The samples, he said, were “very typical” of what would be found in heavy-traffic urban areas.

The lead could pose a risk of poisoning for children if they played in the soil or were otherwise in contact with it, Mr. Mugdan said, and he recommended that property owners cover the soil with mulch, plantings or concrete, and that they paint over any lead-based paint or strip it off carefully to avoid spreading it.

But community advocates on Staten Island want more aggressive government action. They are asking for a federal or city cleanup in residential areas similar to what the E.P.A. plans for the old lead factory site.

“If the problem is so common, why not come up with a model project to address it?” said Beryl A. Thurman, executive director and president of the North Shore Waterfront Conservancy of Staten Island, a watchdog group. “It’s not enough to have the department of health tell people, ‘Make sure you wash your hands and put down some wood chips.’ ”

Community advocates and public interest lawyers say an underlying problem is lax enforcement of the city’s 2004 law requiring landlords to conduct annual inspections of homes where children under 6 are living and to correct lead hazards.

Ms. Rodriguez said the $1,300-a-month apartment in Port Richmond that she shared with another family had no peeling paint except behind the heater. But when her son’s test results after a checkup showed a lead level of 25 micrograms per deciliter of blood, it led to an inspection by the city’s Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. The inspector found lead in 23 of 154 readings taken from walls and windowsills, his report said, as well as mold and missing detectors for smoke and carbon monoxide.

A spokesman for the Department of Housing Preservation and Development said that officials were not available to comment for this article but that the agency had issued 31,463 violations in 2009 over complaints about lead paint and did more than $6 million worth of work to correct lead hazards.

Some doctors say that the C.D.C. could act more aggressively to identify poisoning cases by lowering the threshold at which lead levels are considered elevated. That threshold is 10 micrograms per deciliter of blood in children under 6. But Dr. John Rosen, who founded the lead program at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx in 1972, said research had established that even at levels as low as 5 micrograms per deciliter, lead could cause irreversible impairment to intelligence quotient, motor skills and behavior.

“The current level is not safe,” said Dr. Rosen, whose program cares for 1,200 children and runs a safe house for families who need to flee their homes because of lead contamination.

Since Ms. Rodriguez and her son moved in November, to a cramped second-floor apartment they share with relatives, Carlos’s lead level has fallen to 8.7. On a recent afternoon, he bounded up the stairs after his mother, munched on Cheetos and watched “Thomas and Friends” on television before falling asleep in midmotion on a plastic chair.

Ms. Rodriguez said she was on high alert for any signs of illness in her son and washed his hands several times a day. She was also following doctor’s orders to give him iron supplements and feed him a diet high in dairy products and vegetables.

Watching Carlos sleep, Ms. Rodriguez said she was not as panicked as she had been when she first learned he had lead poisoning.

“I worry about whether he’ll be able to learn like other children,” she said, breaking down in tears. “He’s so little. The question is, how will he do in the future?”

**Member of Make the Road New York**
The Cheap Cost of Cheating the Lowest Paid

By FRANCIS X. CLINES

June 25, 2010

Her baby will soon be due, so Modesta Toribio has to grudgingly admit she may not soon make her current career goal — New York's supposedly mandatory $7.25 minimum wage — that she has been routinely denied for the past five years. She inched her salary up to $6.60 an hour from the starting $5 at a cut-rate Brooklyn clothing store mainly by pestering her bosses. Ms. Toribio has a brassy knack for that, but she has learned it takes a lot to best scheming employers.

Academic studies estimate that unscrupulous employers in New York City keep an extra billion dollars a year by defying New York State's weak labor law and cheating timorous and ill-informed immigrant workers.

Ms. Toribio was both when she arrived from the Dominican Republic 10 years ago. But she evolved into a word-of-mouth investigator and organizer for the Make the Road New York community group. The organization has successfully worked with committed state inspectors to wring wage-theft judgments against scores of employers — $28,000 for a gouged fruit-stand peddler, $70,000 for 99-cent store workers, $400,000 from moguls squeezing the payroll at a sneaker chain.

New York needs a strong labor law like Arizona's. Arizona is rightly notorious for its abusive anti-immigrant law. But its labor law seriously penalizes employers who retaliate against outspoken workers, and it provides confidentiality for whistleblowers and faster, bigger damages for employers who ignore wage-theft judgments. A bill to toughen New York's law awaits action by the Legislature, which is in its closing days, when the good and the ugly elbow for attention.

“Albany could stop an awful lot of injustice,” Ms. Toribio says prayerfully. Her voice had a steely lilt on Friday when she talked other wage-cheated workers into going with her to Manhattan to picket a grocery store. She knows a “scared guy” there, a Mexican immigrant who earns $5 an hour with no vacation or overtime allowed in his 70-hour week. “The boss,” she says, “has to understand a worker is not alone.”
Students to Protest Possible End of Free Rides

By SHARON OTTERMAN
June 10, 2010

Students are planning to walk out of 23 high schools to demonstrate outside City Hall against the threatened end of free bus and subway rides to and from school, protest organizers said Thursday. **

The protest planned for Friday will, coincidentally, occur just one day after Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg announced an initiative to combat chronic truancy.

While the two events are not related, the organizers say they are willing to risk punishment to demonstrate. At least two of them said the time of the walkout — noon — was chosen partly because the police generally stopped picking up truants at that hour.

Organizers said they expected more than 2,000 students to take part, but how many will actually come to City Hall was unclear. It is expected to be a day of light attendance anyway, with the looming end of the school year and an annual class-skipping tradition known as senior cut day, which different schools observe on different days. And since there was no school on Thursday due to a professional development day for teachers, the possibility of a four-day weekend may be too hard for some students to resist.

“Friday is a regular school day,” said Marge Feinberg, a spokeswoman for the city’s Education Department. “We expect students to be in school during school hours.”

The City Hall action is being organized by the Urban Youth Collaborative, an umbrella group of youth organizations.

Caitlin Ervin, a coordinator with the group, said the Police Department and the Parks Department had issued permits for the group’s events, which include a rally outside City Hall at 1 p.m., a march across the Brooklyn Bridge and a second rally outside the New York City Transit headquarters, on Jay Street. But she said the group did not tell the police that most participants would be students skipping class.

Paul J. Browne, the chief spokesman for the Police Department, said the police had issued a permit for approximately 150 people to gather in Brooklyn and walk across the bridge to Manhattan at 4:30 p.m., not during school hours. The Parks Department said it had issued a permit for the City Hall Park rally.

Mr. Browne would not comment on whether the police planned any action against the protest. “The Police Department addresses truancy on an ongoing basis but does not disclose enforcement tactics for any given day,” he said.

Organizers said lawyers and parents would accompany the students, partly to help in case of a crackdown.

Students have been holding demonstrations supporting the long-standing practice of providing city students with free bus and subway rides since the Metropolitan Transportation Authority proposed phasing them out several months ago, citing diminished contributions from the city and the state. The authority’s board has not yet authorized ending the free rides.

Separately, the mayor announced a new task force on Thursday to address chronic absenteeism and truants, defined as students who miss school for 20 days or more in a year. Because the initiative is not directed toward students who skip one day, Jason Post, a spokesman for Mayor Bloomberg, said the walkout did not directly relate to the new effort.

At Francis Lewis High School in Queens, one of the 23 schools participating, Khair Morrison, 16, said he was having some trouble organizing students for the walkout because so many had indicated that they were not planning to be in school that day anyway. Friday is the school’s unofficial, and unsanctioned, senior cut day, as well as the day after the senior prom. On top of everything else, it is also the day when the World Cup, a matter of obsession for some students, begins.

Of the school’s 4,400 students, about 50 have told Khair they will attend the City Hall rally. “We are trying to confirm with every student so that they go where they say they are going to go,” he said.

**Make the Road New York youth members organized the rally with our partners in the Urban Youth Collaborative.
Program to Combat Asthma Would Lean on Landlords

By JAVIER C. HERNANDEZ
May 11, 2010

For decades, public health experts have tried — and mostly failed — to contain an asthma epidemic that afflicts many New Yorkers living in the city’s poorest neighborhoods.

But now, the City Council hopes to significantly curtail the spread of the lung disease by forcing landlords at some of the most badly maintained buildings to clean up their premises.

Under legislation to be introduced on Wednesday, the Council would require owners of 175 apartment buildings to take steps to eliminate garbage, mold and vermin — all factors that have been linked to asthma.

If they do not comply, the city would file liens against the properties, effectively billing landlords for the work required.

The City Council speaker, Christine C. Quinn, said swift action was needed to stop the public health crisis caused by asthma, which affects more than 400,000 New Yorkers, many of them children.

“It is in no way shape or form getting better, and it is something we need to get addressed,” Ms. Quinn said in an interview. “Not every landlord is a good landlord in the city of New York. We need to have stricter laws to deal with those bad apples.”

The city would focus its initial efforts on private buildings of all sizes, with the most violations involving garbage, insects, mold, mice and rats. Landlords would be given three months to make changes; if they failed to comply, the city would do the work itself and charge them for it.

The effort, described as an 18-month pilot project, would serve as a public health experiment of sorts. Under the legislation, the city would require landlords to use different methods to treat problems in their buildings — having one group use bleach to eliminate mold, for instance, while asking others to focus on repairing pipe leaks that contribute to mold. Researchers would later study the results to see which strategies were most effective.

Under the program, tenants would also be offered training on how to reduce asthma risks.

In recent years, the city has taken an increasingly aggressive stance toward landlords who allow buildings to fall into disrepair. The proposal to be released Wednesday echoes a 2007 law that gave the city broad power to force landlords with histories of code violations to make significant repairs. But that law focuses on major code violations, like a lack of heat, while the proposed legislation is specifically tailored to combat asthma.

A landlord challenged the 2007 legislation in court, arguing that the city had overstepped its authority. Many landlord groups, however, supported the effort, and the city ultimately prevailed.

On Tuesday, it remained unclear whether landlords would rally behind the asthma legislation, which would impose significant expenses on building owners at a time when they say they are struggling to stay afloat amid high vacancy rates.

Frank Ricci, a spokesman for the Rent Stabilization Association, one of the city’s largest landlord groups, said he was reviewing the bill. Though he said the legislation had merits, including the fact that it was a pilot program, he noted that tenants sometimes shared the blame for a building’s shoddy condition.

“It’s not always the owner being a bad guy,” Mr. Ricci said. “Sometimes they have tenants who don’t cooperate.”

Ms. Quinn said she was confident that the bill, co-sponsored by Councilwoman Rosie Mendez of Manhattan, would earn the support of landlords and garner enough votes to pass.

“If you are a landlord that takes good care of your building,” she said, “you have nothing to worry about.”

A spokesman for Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg said his office was reviewing the legislation and had not decided whether to support it.

If the bill passes, the city will probably focus on buildings in high-poverty areas, where asthma cases are most prevalent.

For residents in those areas, the sights are familiar: walls and ceilings overtaken by mold, hallways strewn with trash, rats and mice nipping at everything in sight.

Maria Quintanilla, a home attendant from Bushwick, Brooklyn, who has asthma, lives in an apartment with broken doors and windows. She said they had not been replaced in 10 years.

When her roommate developed asthma seven years ago, she became concerned that the poor state of her apartment was causing the illness, she said. Ms. Quintanilla began throwing items away, hoping to get rid of whatever was causing the condition.

“The living conditions are very, very poor,” she said.

**Make the Road New York drafted the bill with other members of the Coalition for Asthma-Free Homes.**
In what could set off a major City Hall battle, two City Council members from the Bronx plan to propose a bill on Tuesday that would guarantee wages of at least $10 an hour, nearly $3 above the minimum wage, to all workers at development projects receiving public subsidies.

The bill is likely to draw strong opposition from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, who vigorously fought, and ultimately lost, a struggle last year over similar wage requirements at a mall that was planned to be built inside the city-owned Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx.

The plans for a mall were defeated by the Council because Mr. Bloomberg and the developer refused to include pay rates higher than the minimum wage of $7.25 an hour.

The Fair Wages for New Yorkers Act, as the bill is being called, would have wide-ranging implications for the largest development projects in New York, replacing agreements hammered out project by project with a broad standard intended to protect low-wage workers. It would affect only future projects, not projects that have already been approved.

Real estate groups typically oppose so-called living-wage requirements, arguing that they stifle development and hinder private investment.

Roughly 140 municipalities across the country have passed similar legislation, including Los Angeles, San Francisco and Santa Fe, N.M., said Robert Pollin, an economics professor at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst who has studied living wage issues.

“The idea is, where government subsidies are involved, the people who receive those subsidies should not be paying poverty-level wages,” said Councilman G. Oliver Koppell, who is co-sponsoring the bill with Annabel Palma.

A variety of unions, community groups, policy advocates** are planning a major push to rally support for the bill. They have scheduled a news conference for Tuesday morning on the steps of City Hall.

The bill’s fate will rest in large measure with the Council speaker, Christine C. Quinn, who voted against the Armory project last year but whose office declined to comment on the wage bill.

The fight will feature many of the same faces that last year urged the Related Companies, the developer selected for the Kingsbridge Armory, to require that future tenants pay employees at least $10 an hour. Higher wages were warranted, they argued, because Related would have received more than $50 million in tax credits and exemptions. Related and Mr. Bloomberg refused, arguing that the wage requirement would make it difficult to attract tenants.

While the Kingsbridge Armory battle centered on wages at one project, the wage bill seeks to expand the debate to developments across the city that receive public subsidies worth more than $100,000, whether in discounted land sales, tax credits or other incentives.

The mandated wages will be $10 an hour with benefits, or $11.50 without. Wages would increase to keep up with inflation.

The Bloomberg administration is likely to oppose the bill on the grounds that projects needing subsidies should not be burdened with extra wage requirements, and that in a stagnant economy, job creation should be paramount.

The Bloomberg administration and the city’s Economic Development Corporation plan to commission a national study to examine how living wage laws have worked in other cities. Dr. Pollin, who has completed similar studies, said he found that businesses adjusted to the salary requirements by increasing productivity or raising prices slightly.

The bill’s supporters view its introduction as a watershed moment.

“If you want charity, you have to be charitable,” said Rubén Díaz Jr., the Bronx borough president. “If you want a public benefit to your project, then your project has to benefit the public. It’s a simple equation.”

** Including Make the Road New York
For President Obama, Many Gaps to Fill on the Bench

May 09, 2010

BY OP–ED CONTRIBUTORS

Many argue that the Supreme Court lacks diversity. As President Obama closes in on a nominee, 10 legal experts make their case for the kind of justice the court needs.

An Immigrant

The United States is a nation founded on, and constantly rejuvenated by, the labor, creativity and diversity of its immigrant communities. And as recent events have shown, struggles over the future of immigration are to the 21st century what the civil rights movement was to the 20th. This is why the Supreme Court needs a justice who is a naturalized citizen.

From 1907 to 2009, nearly 24 million immigrants were naturalized as citizens — some seven million in the past 10 years alone. Still, millions of undocumented immigrants who contribute daily to our country’s economic and cultural vitality are forced to live in the shadows. A Supreme Court justice with experience as an immigrant would signal America’s commitment to maintaining its pluralistic society.

— ANDREW FRIEDMAN, co-executive director of Make the Road New York, an immigrant rights group
City's Sick-Pay Plan: A Battle of Perspective

By MICHAEL HOWARD SAUL and SUMATHI REDDY
May 11, 2010

The City Council is to hold a hearing Tuesday on legislation to require all city businesses to provide sick pay, a proposal that advocates laud as crucial to public health and opponents see as devastating to businesses.

The bill would require businesses to provide employees up to 72 hours, or nine days, a year for sick leave. For business with fewer than 20 workers on the payroll, the maximum number of paid sick leave hours would be 40, or five days.**

Under the bill, sick leave could be used for an employee's own mental or physical illness or for attending to the illness of a spouse, child, parent, grandparent or domestic partner.

Advocates estimate that at least 250,000 working New Yorkers aren't offered paid sick leave. New York would follow cities such as San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Milwaukee in requiring mandatory sick pay.

"It's a good family bill," said Council Member Gale Brewer, a Manhattan Democrat who is the bill's prime sponsor. "It is very, very hard to imagine not being able to pick up your [sick] kids because you're afraid of losing your job or you are afraid of not getting paid."

Neither Council Speaker Christine Quinn nor Mayor Michael Bloomberg has taken a formal position on the bill. Mr. Bloomberg supports paid sick leave conceptually, but he has said he has concerns about how small businesses would be affected by the legislation, aides said.
The bill has 35 sponsors, meaning it could withstand a mayoral veto. But without Ms. Quinn's support, it is unlikely to move forward.

Local businesses are waging a fight against the legislation, which they view as a tax and a hypocritical move by city officials who claim to be business-friendly. A new coalition spearheaded by the five borough chambers of commerce estimates that the bill would cost businesses $3 billion to $3.5 billion a year.

"This is not a real paid sick leave bill, it's a paid time off bill," said Robert Bookman, an attorney for the New York City chapter of the New York State Restaurant Association. "In this economy, we're talking about a huge new tax on businesses."

Matthew Greller, an attorney and lobbyist for the theater and temporary staffing industries, said the bill would force movie theater owners to raise ticket prices. "Unfortunately, that's going to be a reality, they don't really have much flexibility and choice," he said.

Workers say the bill would be a boost to public health.

"When the boss makes you work when you're sick, you end up infecting the food, infecting the other customers," said Maximino Santos, 46, a chef from Mexico, said in Spanish through a translator. "I myself had to buy a face mask so I wouldn't infect the food from my coughing."

Mr. Santos, who plans to testify at Tuesday's hearing, said he lost his job this year because of missed days due to bronchitis and pneumonia. "I was fired because I was sick," he said.

In response to intense criticism from the business community, Ms. Brewer made several changes to the legislation. She altered the definition of small businesses—it was companies with less than 10 workers. Now, nearly nine out of 10 companies in the city would be classified as small businesses and would be required to cover the lower number of sick pay hours.

To deal with complaints from companies that hire seasonal workers, Ms. Brewer added a requirement that workers must be on the job for 90 days to be eligible for sick leave.

Ms. Brewer and advocates said they disagree with businesses that complain that sick pay will be too costly. They point to a report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics that showed, in March 2009, the average cost for sick leave per employee hour worked for private-sector employers was 23 cents. For service sector workers, the cost is even lower: 8 cents an hour, the report showed.

"We don't think it's going to cost as much as businesses contend," Ms. Brewer said.

Business owners say they know the impact on their own shops. Marc Murphy, a restaurateur whose operations include Landmarc and Ditch Plains, said the legislation would cost his company $200,000 a year. "This is just another example of how the government continues to impose regulation that costs businesses more money," he said.

Kathryn Wylde, president of the Partnership for New York City, a nonprofit representing the city's business leaders, acknowledged that opposing sick pay is a tough battle for the business community to wage.

"It's like motherhood—how are you going to be against it?" Ms. Wylde said. "But we could end up losing jobs simply because employers don't have the margins to absorb these costs."

** Make the Road New York has been a principal advocate of paid sick leave and has mobilized support for the proposed legislation from a diverse group of workers and businesses citywide.**
Thousands choose to starve themselves in order to press for immigration justice

Albor Ruiz
Thursday, June 3rd 2010

Hunger in New York is nothing new. But lately immigrants and their supporters - feeling betrayed by the Obama administration and Congress - have given the old, shameful problem an unexpected dimension.

Dozens of people are freely choosing to starve - and risk their lives - as an extreme means to pressure politicians to pay attention and repair our broken migration system.

"We want to show Sen. [Chuck] Schumer that we cannot wait any longer, that we need him to take action on the Dream Act in the Senate," said Osmán Canales, 21, a permanent U.S. resident who arrived here from El Salvador in 1999.

Canales, of Long Island, is one of about 10 young people from the New York State Youth Leadership Council who began a hunger strike Tuesday outside Schumer’s Manhattan office. The group is demanding the New York senator move the Dream Act forward as a stand-alone bill.

Schumer, chairman of the Senate immigration subcommittee, co-sponsored the legislation that would allow immigrant youth who were brought to the U.S. as children, graduated from high school and completed two years of college or military service to apply for citizenship. But the students say Schumer has done little to move the bill forward.

The students had planned to begin their strike last week but they postponed it after Schumer promised to give them a response regarding the possibility of a congressional hearing on the Dream Act. They decided to act, they say, after the senator failed to respond.

"We plan to stay here until we get a commitment from the senator," Canales vowed.

Mike Morey, the senator’s spokesman, had this to say:

"We have held multiple meetings and conversations with them over the past week about our efforts to advance and pass comprehensive immigration reform, which would include the Dream Act … We also encourage the students to target those senators who are not yet supporting comprehensive immigration reform."

More and more immigrants, tired of empty words, are taking direct action. Yesterday, more than 50 people began a 72-hour fast organized by Make the Road NY and the New Sanctuary Coalition.

"Following the example of labor leader and immigrant rights champion César Chávez, the fast will be an opportunity for prayer, reflection and strengthening the commitment for justice for immigrants," the organizers said.

City Council members Julissa Ferreras, Ydanis Rodríguez, and Jumaane Williams joined the fasters. Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-N.Y.) and the Rev. Donna Schaper, of Judson Memorial Church, came to offer support.

Meanwhile, Oswaldo Cabrera, 42, an Ecuadorian immigrant, remains on a hunger strike since early last month in a church in New Jersey. He says he is willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of "5 million American children of undocumented parents who live in fear of them not coming back home at the end of the day."

On Tuesday, 55 people - among them Council members Ferreras, Daniel Dromm and Brad Lander - were arrested at 1 Federal Plaza in the third week of civil disobedience over the racist Arizona law.

These actions mark an escalation in tactics by immigration advocates and are certain to intensify. For immigrants of all ages these are desperate times and they demand desperate measures.
NYC Protesters Hit The Streets To Decry Arizona Illegal Immigration Law

BY ERICA PEARSON AND KATIE NELSON AND NEWS WIRE SERVICES
Tuesday, April 27th 2010

Carrying signs saying "Stop Deporting Families!" and "No Human Being is Illegal," dozens rallied yesterday afternoon in downtown Manhattan against Arizona's new law making it a state crime to be in the country illegally.

"It's unthinkable to have a law like that," said Soledad Villacis**, 34, at the rally in front of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services offices. "When they are looking for our votes we don't look undocumented to them," said Villacis, who came to Ridgewood, Queens, from Ecuador without documentation but later became a legal resident. "Just because you eat guacamole and listen to Latin music doesn't mean you are undocumented."

"This is not just about politics. This is about the soul of our country," said the Rev. Michael Ellick, assistant pastor of Judson Memorial Church in the West Village.

Meanwhile in Washington yesterday, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano -- a former governor of the Grand Canyon State -- also balked at the bill: The Arizona law "will detract from and siphon resources that we need to focus on those in the country illegally who are committing serious crimes, in addition to violating our nation's immigration laws," Napolitano told Senate Judiciary Committee members.

Attorney General Eric Holder said the Justice Department is considering launching a court challenge to the Arizona statute, which was signed into law Friday.

New York advocacy groups said they have sent a letter to President Obama demanding he strike down the Arizona law, and filed a lawsuit to get records that show police cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

**Member of Make the Road New York
Transgenders Win Discrimination Tiff With American Eagle Outfitters, AG Andrew Cuomo Forces Changes

BY ERICA PEARSON
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Wednesday, May 12th 2010

It just got a little easier for a transgender person to work at American Eagle Outfitters - at least on paper.

Attorney General Andrew Cuomo has forced the flannel and khaki outpost to make some changes, including nixing a rule about employee "personal appearance" that banned men from wearing women's clothing and ladies from dressing as guys.

"This shows me that there's faith and hope. There might be a domino effect, that's what I'm hoping for," said Joi-elle White, 35, a transgender member of Make the Road New York.

The community group complained to Cuomo's office about what it called a pattern of discrimination against transgender job hunters. A probe confirmed the complaints, officials said.

The retailer - which employs more than 2,000 people in its 61 New York stores - signed a settlement deal promising to change its policies and employee handbook.

"To avoid further expense and the distraction of a prolonged argument, [we have] agreed to a compromise settlement in this case, with the understanding that AEO is not admitting to the findings," a company spokeswoman said.

"We wholeheartedly believe that transgender individuals should be treated equally," she added in a statement.

The chain store also has agreed to train its staff on transgender issues - like which pronouns to use when referring to workers and customers.

The April settlement is the first crackdown against a retailer under the section of the state's Human Rights Law that bars employers from discriminating against applicants because of their gender identity.

"If more places would follow behind American Eagle's experience, a lot of us would be able to work more. and there would be less of us on the street or on the Internet risking our life just to survive," White said.
Mother Seeks Justice for Brooklyn 'Hate Crime' Victim who May Face Deportation

BY Erica Pearson

Wednesday, April 7th 2010

The mother of a Brooklyn man who faces deportation after being arrested when he told cops he was the victim of an anti-gay hate crime wants justice.

"It hurts me so much," said his mom, Jorgelina Aguirre. "He's there in jail unjustly."

Aguirre, supported by the nonprofit group Make the Road New York, will hold a news conference Wednesday to call for the Brooklyn district attorney to drop charges against her son.

Ricardo Muñiz, 23, an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, told police he was dancing with another gay friend at a Flatbush bar in July when an older man started making anti-gay slurs.

According to Muñiz, two men, including the one who had insulted him, followed him and his two friends when they left the bar after it closed at 4:30 a.m. They were walking along Caton Ave. toward Ocean Ave., he said, when the taunts began again.

Muñiz told his mother that one of the men yelled, "You're going to die, f----t."

Muñiz said he tried to calm the situation when his friends began to fight with the two men. "I intervened, telling the younger man to calm down. That's when he took off his belt, wrapped it around his hand and attacked me with the buckle," he told police, later saying that the older man took a bat from his car and hit him with it.

But the investigating officer at the 70th Precinct stationhouse soon became skeptical about Muñiz's account, police sources aid.

At the scene, cops found Jose Cruz, the older man, badly injured. Cruz had to be placed in a medically induced coma and spent several weeks in Kings County Hospital, police said.

Muñiz said Cruz hurt himself when he fell during the struggle.

Police also said Muñiz listed an incorrect phone number on the report and was difficult to reach.

Two weeks later, Muñiz, who was working as a busboy, was arrested at the Bushwick home he shared with his mom. Prosecutors charged him with first-degree assault, and he has been held without bail at Rikers Island since.

"It seems to be ridiculous," said his lawyer Deron Castro. "He was the victim of a hate crime. He was the one who was being attacked. He should never have been arrested in this case."

Aguirre said she's astounded that such an injustice could happen in America.

"He suffered discrimination in Mexico, and we wanted to come to the U.S. so he could live confidently and be open with his sexuality," said Aguirre, 45, who works as a seamstress. "I thought that this was a fair country, but it isn't."

Make the Road New York staffers said if the incident had been prosecuted as a hate crime, Muñiz would have qualified for a U-visa, which gives temporary legal status to victims.
It is almost incomprehensible, but last Thursday a Brooklyn jury decided that the 2008 murder of José Sucuzhanay was not a hate crime. They seem to be the only ones who think that way.

"Beating a man to death with a baseball bat and a broken bottle while screaming anti-immigrant and homophobic epithets is clearly a hate crime," said Ana María Archila, co-executive director of Make the Road New York.

Yes it is, any reasonable person would agree.

And yet, Hakim Scott, one of Sucuzhanay's killers, was convicted of first-degree manslaughter, but acquitted of a crime motivated by blind intolerance. Scott faces up to 40 years when he is sentenced on June 9. He escaped life in jail on the hate-crime charge.

"Latino communities throughout the city are saddened by the verdict, which failed to characterize the vile murder of Jose Sucuzhanay as a hate crime," Archila said.

On Dec. 7, 2008, Sucuzhanay, 31, and his brother, Romel, 36, who was visiting from Ecuador, had been drinking at a church party and later at a Mexican restaurant. The two were holding on to each other as they walked home along Bushwick Ave. at 3:30 on that fateful Sunday morning.

Suddenly, they were brutally attacked by Scott, 26, and his co-defendant Keith Phoenix, 30. Another jury is still deliberating the fate of Phoenix.

According to witnesses at the scene, after yelling, "Check out those f—ts over there," the defendants pulled up in an SUV at a stoplight and jumped out, the vicious assault began.

While Romel Sucuzhanay was able to escape the attack with minor injuries, José Sucuzhanay suffered a beating on the head with an aluminum bat and a glass bottle.

The attackers, witnesses said, left him for dead on a Bushwick sidewalk. "F—ing Spanish!" they yelled to the fresh-faced Ecuadoran as he lay bleeding on a Brooklyn street.

He lingered for five days at Elmhurst Hospital and died the day before his grieving mother arrived from Ecuador. He leaves behind two young daughters.

By all accounts, José Sucuzhanay was a good man. But the thugs who savagely beat him did not care. They did not know him - they only knew they hated José Sucuzhanay because he was Latino and they thought he was gay.

José Sucuzhanay had come to New York nine years before in pursuit of the quintessential immigrant dream. A success story, José Sucuzhanay had recently opened his own real estate business not far from where he was assaulted.

The verdict comes one month after a 19-year old Long Island man was convicted of manslaughter as a hate crime in the stabbing death of another Ecuadorian immigrant, Marcelo Lucero.

These attacks are tragic proof that for an alarming number of people, it is open season on Hispanics.

Last Friday, members of Sucuzhanay's family joined Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez (D-N.Y.), City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, Councilman Daniel Dromm (D-Jackson Heights) and Make the Road New York to condemn the verdict. They called for improved public policy to prevent future hate crimes.

Public policies that vilify and criminalize immigrants like Arizona's SB1070, or that approve of unequal treatment of gay people like the state Senate's recent decision to deny New Yorkers marriage equality, Archila said, create an environment of tacit support for discrimination and hatred.

"As a city," Archila said, "we must turn our attention to proactively preventing hate crimes and the xenophobia, homophobia and ignorance that motivate them."
We Must Punish Employers who Rip Off Pay of Workers

Tuesday, April 6, 2010

Andrew Friedman**

Every payday, thousands of New York workers are robbed of their wages. Each week, in New York City alone, more than $18 million is stolen by lawless employers from low wage workers.

That’s close to a billion dollars each year!

Is news of this crime wave splashed across the police blotter? Not a chance.

In fact, New York State labor law is so weak that even employers who get caught stealing from their workers often end up paying less than they would have had to pay if they had followed the law in the first place.

Indeed, unscrupulous employers currently build the low risk of getting caught, and the minuscule penalties required, into the cost of doing business.

Weak laws have led to nonpayment of minimum wage and overtime becoming the norm, not the exception, in many of the key industries in New York State, such as retail, restaurants, service, and residential construction.

Recent reports by the National Employment Law Project and the New York State Department of Labor show that the problem is reaching epidemic proportions.

Recently, state Sen. Diane Savino and Assemblyman Carl Heastie said, “Enough is enough,” and introduced The Wage Theft Prevention Act, landmark legislation to create real consequences for lawless employers and protect the well-being of all New Yorkers. The legislation is quickly gathering momentum and support in Albany.

Rampant wage theft takes money away from families who earned it and desperately need it in these tough economic times, to spend on rent, food, school supplies and clothing. It stalls our economic recovery, too: Wage thieves benefit from an unfair competitive advantage over those businesses that do right by their employees and follow the law.

It also undermines our tax base. Studies show that nonpayment of minimum wage goes hand in hand with failure of employers to pay into the states' workers' compensation and unemployment insurance systems. The time has come for New York State to put an end to this crime spree.

Winning the fight against wage theft demands better tools than are currently provided under New York law. In states like New Mexico and Idaho, employers must pay back stolen wages plus 200% damages. In New York, damages are a paltry 25%.

Under New York’s prevailing wage law, employers who steal $25,000 in wages face felony prosecutions. But employers who steal even a million dollars in subminimum wages face, at most, a misdemeanor on the first prosecution.

Perhaps most problematic, even those employers who are found guilty of wage theft are often able to evade efforts to actually collect the money they owe. Tools from other portions of New York law, such as freezing asset transfers or creating a lien for wages on employers’ property, would keep the worst offenders on the hook for the wages they owe.

It’s time that New York became a leader in the nationwide fight against wage theft.

The Wage Theft Prevention Act would accomplish just that. Increased damages, stronger criminal penalties for egregious violations and better protections for whistleblowers would change the calculation of bad actors. New Yorkers could rest assured that a good day’s work would earn them a good day’s pay.

**Co-executive director of Make the Road New York
Queens Mall Urged to Hike Pay

Edgar Sandoval and Meredith Kolodner

April 26, 2010

The Queens Center Mall may make millions a year, but its workers are barely scraping by, community activists say.

The 3,100 retail workers at the massive Elmhurst mall get no health insurance and can barely survive on the $7.25 to $8 an hour they earn, said officials with the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store union.

About 100 community and union members handed out flyers yesterday to shoppers, hoping to win support for raising salaries to a living wage as part of their Queens Center Mall Campaign. Community leaders say the mall owner, the Macerich Company, has received about $100 million in tax breaks, and should require tenants to pay workers $10 an hour. Macerich officials could not be reached for comment. The retail workers did not join the rally.

"They are intimidated," said Julissa Bisono of community group Make the Road. "They need their jobs."

Shopper Stephen Jarrett was quick to side with the workers. "What can you really do with a minimum wage in New York?" asked Jarrett, 35, a sales clerk from the Rockaways. "No one can expect anyone to live on $7 an hour."
It's A Bad Time For City, Mayor Bloomberg To Slash ESL Funding

By: Albor Ruiz
June 24th 2010

More than 100 protestors** rallied Wednesday on the steps of City Hall demanding Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council save free English classes for immigrants.

The demonstrators were joined by City Councilman Daniel Dromm (D-Jackson Heights), immigrant and community leaders to denounce plans to slash funds for the Council's Immigrant Opportunities Initiative. They called for its full restoration in the proposed city budget.

"We rallied to save the IOI," said Dromm, chairman of the Council's Immigration Committee. "We want to ensure funding is not cut. It was at $5 million in 2010, after a cut of more than 50% in 2009. We want to keep it at the same level."

Further cuts would be disastrous since the IOI is a main sources of funding at the city level for English as a Second Language classes serving nearly 62,000 people.

It also provides critical legal services, helping immigrants protect themselves against workplace exploitation and offers advice in cases of domestic violence and housing.

Dromm said that he hopes the mayor and the Council will agree that the IOI is a top priority and must be preserved.

"The people that have the least are the ones affected the most and are the last ones to recover," Dromm said. "These are crucial services for immigrants in New York City."

We all have heard people say things like, "When my grandparents came to America, they really wanted to learn English. Now immigrants don't care anymore."

But don't believe it, it's nothing but a big myth.

"It is not true, we are anxious to learn English," said Carla Trujillo, 43, a Mexican immigrant who has lived in Sunset Park for 10 years and is the mother of a 9-year-old son. "We want to fully integrate to this society and to get to know American culture....We need to learn English because if we don't it is as if we were mute, as if we did not have voices," Trujillo added.

The truth is that so many immigrants want to learn English that there are never enough programs to accommodate all of them.

Despite the huge demand, the mayor proposed $11.68 million in cuts to ESL and adult literacy programs. The slash would take $5.18 million from the Department of Youth and Community Development Adult Literacy Programs and eliminating the $5 million Immigrant Opportunities Initiative and the $1.5 million Adult Literacy Services Initiative.

The need is tremendous. About a quarter of adults in the city - about 1.23 million - have inadequate English skills, but only 62,467 are enrolled in government-funded literacy programs.

They come from all over the world.

A recent intermediate ESL class at the Jackson Heights Library consisted of 30 students from such diverse nations as Bangladesh, Egypt, Colombia, Peru, India, China, Korea, Russia and Moldova. The class is covered under a different budget but is also at risk of being drastically cut.

If the budget cuts go through, these programs will be unavailable to non-English speaking New Yorkers. If that is the case, no one should blame them for not learning English.

Dromm is hopeful. He believes that Council Speaker Christine Quinn will continue to support the IOI.

While he praised Bloomberg for speaking out about immigrant issues Dromm warned the mayor, "It is time to put your money where your mouth is."

Rafael de los Santos, 55, a Dominican immigrant who works at a New Jersey window factory and takes ESL classes at the nonprofit Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation is passionate about education.

"We have to defend education," he said. "Without it we can't get good jobs and contribute to society."

** Including members of Make the Road New York, who have worked to preserve and expand funding for immigrant education opportunities.
Thousands of kids put down their books and took to the streets Friday to protest the possible end of free bus and subway rides to school.

The students tried to teach Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and lawmakers in Albany a lesson by walking out of class. They’re protesting a plan that would eliminate free transit passes for more than half a million New York City students.

"Walking out of school today shows that students understand their rights and they understand that this is their civil duty to fight for their rights," said city student Jaritza Geigel.**

In the past, the MTA, the city, and the state shared the cost of the $214 million program, but current budget proposals from Bloomberg and Albany have slashed spending. And the MTA now says it can't afford to support free student passes at all.

An MTA spokesman told CBS 2: "The program needs to be funded by the parties responsible for the education of New York City's students, which are the city and the state."

So far, the city and state haven't come up with the money. One protestor said if the passes are revoked, he won't be able to get an education.

"I can't go to school. Education equals options. If I don't have no education, I don't have no options," said student protester Lester Meyes.

Another demonstrator said the issue goes beyond education. For many families it's an issue of economic survival.

"Less students are gonna come to school because it's gonna be too much money for our parents to afford," said student protester Elizabeth Camarrero.

"They can't afford to pay $1,000 per year per child in the household," said Geigel.

Turnout was lower than the 2,400 organizers had predicted. As for punishment the student protestors might face, the Department of Education said disciplinary action is up to individual principals.

CBS 2 spoke with the MTA late Friday, and a spokesman said he's optimistic a solution will be reached to preserve student passes. He admitted he's not sure how, but said one thing is for certain: in spite of intense budget battles, nobody wants these kids to miss the bus.

Organizers chose Friday, in part, because the date, 6/11, is the number New Yorkers dial if they have a problem with public transportation.

**Youth leader at Make the Road New York.
Advocates Oppose Cuts to NYC Rent Vouchers

By DEEPTI HAJELA

April 8, 2010

It took 19 years for Sagrario Mendez** to get the rental-assistance vouchers she first applied for in 1990.

In just months, they may be taken away, leaving the 61-year-old disabled former factory worker unable to pay the rent on her studio apartment in Queens.

The New York City Housing Authority, the largest in the country, has a $45 million deficit in its Section 8 program for subsidized housing vouchers, and says that without additional funds to make up that gap, the agency may have to cut up to 10,500 families from the program this summer.

Mendez and advocates for the city's low-income renters and homeless populations were dismayed Wednesday, saying such a move would be catastrophic.

"If they cut Section 8 for me, I would have to use the money I get from Social Security to pay for my rent," Mendez said through a translator. "So after I pay rent, I would have no money, not even to pay for the bus or pay for food."

Patrick Markee, senior policy analyst with the Coalition for the Homeless, said cuts to the voucher program would send families out onto the streets and add to the already increasing number of people in city shelters.

"It's really hard to understand how the city could have created this mess," he said, adding, "For a mayor and an administration that pride themselves on being good managers, this is just a colossal mistake."

The city housing authority blames a combination of factors, including funding cuts as well as more demand for the vouchers in these turbulent economic times.

"The situation was really a product of some circumstances that go beyond our administrative control," said Michael Kelly, the authority's general manager.

The Section 8 program is funded by the federal government. The Department of Housing and Urban Development gives housing authorities across the country a set amount each year. In recent years, HUD officials say, they have been warning housing authorities to budget and manage their funds more carefully.

"We have been clear that public housing agencies have a responsibility to accurately manage their voucher programs and that HUD cannot always cover funding shortfalls," HUD said in a statement.

Last May, HUD recommended the city's housing authority stop issuing new vouchers and maintain its existing level. Kelly said the city closed its waiting list for vouchers but did give out some, aiming at people like those in domestic violence situations. In December, the authority had to revoke more than 3,000 vouchers.

Currently, the authority says it is covering close to 102,000 housing units, exceeding by about 1,700 units what the agency can accommodate.

Later this month, HUD is to announce which agencies will get some of a $150 million fund to help housing authorities facing unexpected circumstances.

Kelly said the authority is considering a number of avenues to avoid the cuts. Besides seeking more funds, it is considering changing the subsidy amounts and aggressively rooting out fraud. Kelly said he also was hopeful the number of people leaving the program through attrition would return to normal levels.

**Member of Make the Road New York.
New Yorkers Protest New Arizona Immigration Law

04/24/2010 05:53 PM

By: Ruschell Boone

New Yorkers and immigrant advocates nationwide protested Arizona's controversial new immigration law Saturday.

Members of the group Make The Road New York in the major immigrant neighborhood of Jackson Heights, Queens expressed their opposition to the law, which requires Arizona police to question anyone who is suspected to be in the country illegally.

The measure also allows lawsuits against government agencies that hinder enforcement of immigration laws and makes it illegal to hire undocumented immigrants for day labor.

Protesters said the bill would lead to racial profiling and mistreatment of immigrants. They also called on President Barack Obama and the federal government to take action on immigration reform by May 1, and threatened to campaign against officials who do not take action.

"If they don't, it will be very clear to our community that xenophobia has won the day," said Ana Maria Archila of Make The Road New York. "It will be very clear to our community that the leadership that we have in this country does not have the political will to actually have a real solution to the broken immigration system. And that clarity will be what we are thinking about in September and November when we go to vote."

"I'm not just mad, I'm more than mad. I feel stigmatized. And President Obama, you are the one who has the power to make something happen," said an undocumented day laborer named Jose to NY1 through an interpreter.

In a statement Friday, Bloomberg said he fears Arizona's law will cause foreign investment and tourism to drop drastically.

"[M]any people from around the world may think twice before visiting Arizona and subjecting themselves to potential run-ins with the police. As a city, New York may well benefit from another state undermining its own international competitiveness – we're happy to have those businesses and tourists come here...." said the mayor. "Instead of misguided efforts by states, we need Washington to lead the way with comprehensive immigration reform that secures our borders, promotes economic growth, and honors our American heritage."

The National Coalition of Latino Clergy and Christian Leaders Legal Defense Fund was preparing Saturday a federal lawsuit to prevent the state from applying the law.

President Barack Obama also expressed worry that the state law could trample civil rights.

"Indeed, our failure to act responsibly at the federal level will only open the door to irresponsibility by others," said Obama. "And that includes for example the recent efforts in Arizona which threaten to undermine basic notions of fairness that we cherish as Americans."

Senator Charles Schumer, the chairman of the Senate Immigration Subcommittee, also denounced the measure.

"We need comprehensive immigration reform, but this kind of law, which will be both ineffective and is mean-spirited, is the wrong way to go and I'm opposed to it," said Schumer.

During the bill signing Friday, Republican Arizona Governor Jan Brewer said critics are overreacting and that racial profiling will not be tolerated.
Senator Jose Peralta, The Working Families Party and Make the Road New York Call on Mets to Boycott of 2011 All-Star Game in Arizona – Deliver Petitions Before Subway Series

By José Peralta
Saturday, May 22nd, 2010

Jose Peralta, The Working Families Party and Make the Road New York were at Citi Field, on Friday for the Yankees and Mets urging both teams to boycott the 2011 All-Star Game in protest of Arizona's harsh new immigration law.

10,000 of New Yorkers, and hundreds of thousands of Americans across the country, have signed a petition urging baseball teams to take a stand against un-American extremism, profiling and harassment by boycotting the Arizona All-Star Game.

Just before the Subway Series started, State Senator Jose Peralta of Queens delivered the Working Families letter, signed by thousands of New Yorkers, calling on our home teams to skip next year's All-Star Game unless it is moved out of Arizona or the state rolls back its extreme anti-immigrant measures.

Peralta said “As a Dominican American who represents one of the most diverse communities in this country, I find Arizona’s recent actions anti-immigrant, anti-American and unconstitutional,” said Senator Jose Peralta. He continued “First Gov Brewer signed a bill that legalized racial profiling and then not week later she signed a law targeting Ethnic Studies which legalized intolerance in schools. Her actions are a nod to right-winged hatemongering that we will not tolerate in New York.”

Roberto Lovato of Presente.org said “Presente.org and the more than 100,000 people who've signed our national petition demanding Major League Baseball move the All Star Game out of Arizona are inspired by the almost 10,000 New Yorkers speaking out today. We hope that the Yankees, Mets and MLB commissioner Bud Selig hear the community's pleas and join our fight to end the racial profiling of Arizona's BS1070.”

Daisy Munoz, Colombian immigrant and member of Make the Road New York spoke at the event saying, “As an immigrant in New York Arizona’s new law makes me feel discriminated against. I feel like our rights are being violated. We must all stand up against this injustice.

Wilfredo Larancuent, New York City Co-Chair of the Working Families Party added:

"New York is home to millions of baseball fans and millions of immigrants. The Mets and Yankees have a chance to make civil rights history by being the first teams to declare they won't participate in the All-Star game unless Arizona changes it's terrible law or the game is moved."

Peralta concluded “As a diehard Mets fan, of course I would like to see every Mets on the 2011 All Star team, I just don’t want them playing in a state that legislates intolerance and hatred.

Let’s have the 2011 All Star Game in Queens, the most ethnically diverse and celebrated community in the nation.”
NEW YORK — In the basement of Judson Memorial Church, across from Washington Square Park, Danilo Gonzalez** was lying on a twin-sized inflatable bed set up near the trash bins. Several empty bottles of Gatorade and a Spanish-language entertainment magazine were littered on the floor.

Since Wednesday night, Gonzalez has been fasting for legislative immigration reform. While his body was already weakened by starvation, his eyes tired and hair disheveled, he was still determined.

More than 40 other people, including teenagers and young students, joined Gonzalez in a 72-hour fast, an act of protest by immigrants here and in other parts of the country to call for an immigration overhaul. Along with their advocates, community leaders and elected officials, the immigrants ended their fast Saturday afternoon.

“I have many important reasons why I am doing this,” Gonzalez, 58, who only speaks Spanish, said through an English translator. “On top of it all, I’m already tired of sitting and waiting for nothing. Something needs to be done.”

Through his act of civil disobedience, Gonzalez hopes to get Obama’s attention and put pressure on the Senate to pass comprehensive immigration reform this year. He wanted his real name used for publication, he said, because it’s time to be courageous, come out in the shadows and tell his grim experiences as an undocumented immigrant.

“Before Obama got elected, he said he was going to help people like us. After his first year as president, nothing has changed,” said Gonzalez. “Unfortunately, he has forgotten what he promised, just like he has forgotten his promise to the mothers of U.S. soldiers that he was going to pull the U.S. troops out of Iraq.”

Gonzalez, who is of Guatemalan descent, crossed into the United States in 2005. With the help of an organized crime group involved in human smuggling, he and 53 others took a bus to the Mexican border. He paid the traffickers $7,500, although he says some paid even more.

“People just don’t know what we have gone through. They only think we are bad people because we don’t have the papers to work here,” José Quizhpilema, a 37-year-old Ecuadorian with a crew cut, said in Spanish. Sitting on his bed, adjacent to Gonzalez, he had also been fasting since Wednesday night.

Five years ago, Quizhpilema paid a “coyote” $11,000 to help him cross into the United States. It took him and other immigrants, along with their smugglers, seven days to travel by boat from Ecuador to Mexico.
While in the middle of the Mexican desert, they were captured by "guerillas," or bandits who rob border crossers, and their smugglers decided to bring the group back to Mexico. Days later, they tried again, walking night and day through the desert, with little food or water. After a month-and-a-half journey, they finally succeeded in crossing the Arizona border.

“I’m fasting because, just like me, millions of immigrants in the United States are suffering. We’re human," Quizhpilema said, as he sat on the bed and leaned against the wall. "I left my wife and four young children in Ecuador because I thought I would be able to work here and give them a brighter future someday.”

If Congress doesn’t pass immigration reform soon, however, he plans to return to Ecuador. Living alone in a foreign land that does not like him, he said, is far worse than living in complete poverty.

“My kids are small. They need me. It’s just getting more and more difficult here. There’s nothing more important to me than my family," he said.

**Starving For a Dream**

An eleventh grader at Pan-American International High School, in Queens, had to take his SAT on Saturday morning.

But instead of preparing for the test, Oscar Chico was busy on Friday afternoon making placards and banners with slogans that said, “I am Starving for a Dream,” inside the Judson Church’s congregation hall.

“I fasted for 50 hours. I started my fast on Tuesday night, but I was asked to end it today because I am going to take the test tomorrow," he said while cutting a piece of cloth and handing it to his friend, Sandra Perez, 24, sitting on the floor next to him.

“I have never done anything like this before," Chico said.

He, along with other young students, joined the fast to call for the passage of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act, or the DREAM Act, a bill that would provide undocumented immigrant students who came to the country as minors the chance to earn conditional permanent residency.

“Someday, my dream is to go to Columbia University or Parsons. I love the arts. I would like to be an artist, a poet. Or, I want to take up Latin American studies,” said Chico, a Mexican immigrant. “But for now, I’m fighting for the DREAM Act so I can go to college without any problems.”

When he was 15, he crossed into the United States with his mother and younger brother to be reunited with their father, who had been living for years and working for a pizza restaurant in New York. They paid a coyote $3,000 each to guide them through the desert.

The five-day trek that was promised by the smugglers, he said, turned out to be 12 long days of walking, running and sleeping in the cold. They brought only enough food and water for five days.

“It was the most difficult experience for me. My family and 14 others had to cross the desert and rivers. I had to carry a gallon of water the whole time," Chico recalled. He touched his earrings and looked blankly at the floor.

“On the ninth day, we had no more water to drink, no more food to eat. But we had to continue walking and walking. Then on the eleventh day, we arrived at a coyote’s house at the U.S. border, in Arizona,” he said.

His family, Chico added, stayed at the house for a few days. One day, three vans came and they were divided into groups. Each van carried four or five passengers.

He was lucky, he said, that he and his family were put together in one van. They drove to New York, which took them six days. Chico recounted that they only stayed in a hotel once. The rest of the time, they were on the road.

“I hope Obama will fight for equality, to fight for our rights as humans, to fight for our dreams. I will not give up. I will continue fighting for the DREAM Act up to the very end,” he said. “I promised to myself that, no matter what happens, I will definitely go to school and finish college.”

Back in the basement, Gonzalez was getting ready to give a short speech. In a few minutes, the protesters, led by immigrant advocacy group Make the Road New York, would walk to Washington Square Park and hold a rally near the fountain. He was planning to tell the public about his struggles.

When he can find work, Gonzalez said that he sends his family in Guatemala up to $800 a week. In lean times, he sends $100.

Because he is unemployed, he said that he had not sent anything to his family for two weeks.

“I know I will go back to Guatemala. My family is waiting for me,” he said. “But I would like to see the fruits of my struggle fighting for immigration reform. I have been humiliated, abused and exploited many times, and I don’t want other immigrants who intend to stay to experience that again and again.”

** Make the Road New York members.
Gay Pride Week: Queens Advocates Take On Job Discrimination Against Transgender People

By: Ruschell Boone
June 24, 2010

Looking at Joi-Elle White, it is hard to tell she was born a man, but the transgender New Yorker says once people find out, it often leads to discrimination. She says it especially happens in the workplace.

"It's a shame to be on a job walking on eggshells, to know I could get fired not for my performance at work, because I was always early and willing to stay late and was a hard worker, but just for who I am," says White.

She says she changed career four times in the last 20 years, because many employers would not hire her. Working in retail, health care and other fields, White says if she was discovered during the interview she would not get a call back, even though that is against the law.

White is now a counselor for LGBT youth.

"It's a shame that to feel comfortable I have to work in and around my community," she says.

Ana Maria Archila, the co-executive director of the Jackson Heights advocacy group Make the Road New York, says complaints of discrimination and harassment are very common in the transgender community and it is something that pushes people to work in the underground economy.

After getting numerous complaints from their members, the group did its own study.

"What we found is that at least 30 to 40 percent of these transgender individuals did not even get an interview, and there were at least two retail chains that demonstrated systematic practices of discrimination against transgender people," says Archila.

The group protested against the retail chains last month and took their findings to the state attorney general, who sued two retailers over their hiring practices.

One of the retailers settled a few weeks ago but denied any wrongdoing -- which was seen as a victory for many in the transgender community.

"We are looking for acceptance. If not so much acceptance, respect to just interview me for me. Get to know me for me, not who I am or what I am," says White.

"We are working to make sure that our communities are safe for everyone," says Archila.

They strive to make New York safe for all residents, regardless of who they are or who they want to be.
Bill O’Reilly Compares Transgendered People To Ewoks

By David Edwards
Wednesday, May 19th, 2010

The controversial conservative talk show host Bill O'Reilly is at it again.

Speaking Tuesday night on The O'Reilly Factor, O'Reilly likened transgendered people to Ewoks. The remark was first noted by the blog Queers United.

O'Reilly was speaking about a policy change made by Pittsburgh-based American Eagle Outfitters, which agreed to revise language in their employee handbook barring men from wearing women's clothing and vice versa after a lawsuit filed by transgendered staffers.**

"You see them in malls, American Eagle Outfitters," O'Reilly said. "They got a little pamphlet that says to their employees you have to dress appropriately, particularly on the floor. You have got to dress neat. If you are a man, you can't dress like a woman and visa versa. You can't scare the customers. If your name is Fred, you can't look like Dolly Parton. Transgender people come in, challenge. American Eagle folds."

After others on the program defended American Eagle's policy change, O'Reilly responded, "If you owned a clothing corporation, you say, you can dress like an Ewok if you want... Ewok have genders too."

"All I want is a shirt," O'Reilly concluded. "That's all I want."

American Eagle also agreed to train its employees on transgendered issues as part of a settlement in the suit.

"To avoid further expense and the distraction of a prolonged argument, [we have] agreed to a compromise settlement in this case," a spokesman said. "We wholeheartedly believe that transgender individuals should be treated equally."

View the clip at rawstory.com.

** Make the Road New York brought this case to the New York State Attorney General, who filed the suit.
Make the Road NY gets $300K from Crowley

By Pete Davis

Wednesday, April 14, 2010

It felt like Christmas in April for one Queens organization.

Nearly 100 people – all with smiles on their faces – filled Make the Road New York’s Jackson Heights office on Thursday, April 8, but instead of waiting for Santa Claus with a stack of presents, they were waiting for Congressmember Joseph Crowley who was bringing his own special gift to the group.

Crowley presented Make the Road New York—a group that focuses on promoting economic justice, education and opportunity for all New Yorkers—with a check for $300,000 to help support ongoing adult education programming and legal aid initiatives.

"Make the Road's work to protect the rights of all and fight for economic equality is helping to keep our community strong," said Crowley, who was joined by Councilmember Julissa Ferreras and Danny Dromm at the announcement. "The $300,000 I secured for Make the Road will be put to good use by helping adults get a GED, attend ESL classes and obtain important legal aid."

Crowley has worked with Make the Road New York and its Co-Executive Director Ana Maria Archila for a number of years going back to when it was called the Latin American Integration Center.

Make the Road will use the $300,000 in federal funding to provide adult education programming, including GED and English-as-a-second language ESL classes; and legal support to ensure the rights of tenants, workers, immigrant laborers and others are respected and upheld.

Last year, Make the Road helped more than 1,000 people learn English, obtain a GED and acquire computer skills to help them integrate into the community.

“We make it possible for workers to get the pay they deserve, young people to get an education and families get access to health care," Archila said.

Crowley, who has been a leading proponent for immigration reform, also praised the group’s recent efforts for sending nearly 90 buses with people to Washington D.C. to rally for immigration reform.

“I believe with your support and your help we will get there,” Crowley said.
More than 400 New Yorkers went to Albany today to demand greater protections for tenants, including a bill that would repeal vacancy decontrol.

Tuesday, April 27, 2010

Eileen Markey

In neighborhoods across the city, an army of tenants gathered this morning on side streets and in community center parking lots, boarding rented buses bound for Albany. It is tenant lobby day, an annual event in which activists, tenant association leaders and renters across the city descend on the state capital, hoping to influence elected officials who hold the reins on housing law.

More than 400 people were on their way to Albany this morning, according to Michelle O’Brien, a campaign manager for Housing Here and Now.

The Albany-bound citizen lobbyists represent dozens of organizations across the city, from coalitions of tenant associations to powerhouse community organizations such as Community Voice Heard, Make the Road New York and activist unions DC 37 -- which represents municipal workers – and SEIU 1199, the healthcare workers' union.

The activists are pushing for three bills they believe will preserve what remains of New York's affordability for working and middle class people. O'Brien said the highest priority is the repeal of vacant decontrol, which permits rent stabilized apartments to become market rate when rent reaches $2,000 per month and the tenant moves.

For years tenant advocates have blamed vacancy decontrol for a surge in what they call landlord harassment, in which owners attempt to get rid of long term tenants in order to realize higher rents.

Other legislative priorities include a bill that would put buildings that leave the Mitchell Lama program immediately into rent stabilization.

For Joseph Ferdinand, 57, a member of the NorthWest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, the agenda is straightforward. As he finishes an egg sandwich on the corner of 196th Street and Creston Avenue in the Bronx, Ferdinand explains why vacancy decontrol is important in the Bronx, even in a neighborhood where very few rents are approaching the $2,000 threshold.

"It does effect people in the Bronx, because people elsewhere, in the Lower East Side, in Harlem, in Brooklyn are being forced out because there are no affordable rents," he says. "They are coming here. And the landlords can charge them a little more than they are getting. That pushes up the rent for everyone."

Ferdinand says the trip to Albany is necessary to counteract the influence of the real estate lobby, which can make major contributions to lawmakers' campaigns funds. "We are going up to show our outrage, our concern, that we are mad as hell and we're not going to take this anymore,” he says.
Mexican Immigrant Brutally Beaten In Staten Island

By: Jen Maxfield
June 25, 2010

STATEN ISLAND (WABC) -- A Mexican immigrant is in critical condition after he was attacked on his way home from work in Staten Island early Thursday morning.

The family of Alejandro Galindo just came back from visiting him at the hospital Friday night.

He's was doing a little bit better, but their 52-year-old father is still in critical condition after being beaten by three men in what police in Staten Island are investigating as a hate crime.

Alejandro Galindo was beaten so severely doctors aren't sure he'll be able to see out of his right eye again.

Yet even with this severely swollen eye and nasty gash, the 52-year-old father of four still wanted to report for work in his job as a day laborer.

"When I saw him I said you need to go to the doctor, he was nervous he would lose his job," said Patricia Suarez, a Community Activist.

Friends and family finally convinced Galindo to go to the hospital, where doctors say he may need surgery to repair the damage done when three teens attacked him with a blunt object as he was drinking a beer on the curb along Forest Avenue in Port Richmond.

Galindo's daughter believes, as police do, that her father was targeted because he is a Mexican immigrant.

"Later on and they recognize me and they attack me and my kids, I am very concerned about that," said Blanca Galindo, the victim's daughter.

Galindo is the fourth Mexican immigrant since April in Port Richmond to be beaten.

Police are investigating the series of beatings as hate crimes.

"I am outraged to learn that another anti-Latino hate crime has occurred in our City. We will not tolerate this kind of vicious hatred directed at any community, anywhere in our five boroughs," said City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn. "Those who perpetrated this crime must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. My prayers and thoughts are with the Galindo family and I hope for a quick recovery for Alejandro."

"We are saddened by the news that another vicious crime against an immigrant New Yorker has happened in Staten Island," said Ana Maria Archila, Co-Executive Director of Make the Road New York. "We urge the police, elected officials, and New Yorkers to repudiate these events and create opportunities for our communities to come together and build a stronger New York City."

The Hate Crimes Task Force has classified this attack as a hate crime and is looking for the three suspects. Anyone with information about the hate crime is urged to call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-577-TIPS (8477).
Port Richmond Immigrants Rally Against Hate Crimes
By Doug Auer
May 01, 2010, 4:45PM

Close to 100 immigrants walked this morning through the Port Richmond community many call their home to show that they also deserve to live here -- in Staten Island, in New York and in America -- and they will not be forced out by fear.

"We're here this morning to express outrage at the hate crimes in our community," said Patricia Suarez, an active member of Make the Road New York, a not-for-profit immigrant advocacy organization that helps Hispanic newcomers and spearheaded the rally.

Ms. Suarez was referring to the April 5 beating and robbery of baker Rodulfo Olmedo, for which four suspects have been arrested, and alleged race-motivated attacks against Mexican immigrants on April 17 and April 25.

She also railed against the controversial new Arizona law that allows police to check people's immigration status and demanded Congress undertake comprehensive immigration reform.

The crowd of adults and children gathered inside Make the Road New York's Port Richmond office punctuated Ms. Suarez's words with chants of "Community power" and "Yes, we can."

Her speech was followed by three Port Richmond women speaking about the conflicts immigrants face.

Elizabeth Ramos, 30, recalled how police pulled her over and told her to remove the rosary beads from her car's rearview mirror. She noted that in Arizona, police could have then inquired about her immigration status.

Enriqueta Leal, 40, shared how it is not feasible for her 18-year-old daughter to attend the Culinary Institute of America because of her immigrations status.

And, Yngris Duran, 34, detailed how her previous employer took advantage of immigrant workers, paying them less, providing no sick or vacation days and often threatening to fire them.

The marchers -- carrying American and Mexican flags -- then set out along Port Richmond Avenue to Richmond Terrace, where the one-mile walk ended at the Staten Island Cinco de Mayo Festival in Faber Park.

"We'll be cleaning the streets as we go along to show the positive things immigrants contribute to their communities," said Gabriela O'Leary of Make the Road New York.
Terror Arrest Could Mar Naturalization Process, Group Says

By: Ruschell Boone
05/04/2010

With hundreds of their members set to go through the process of becoming U.S. citizens, coordinators at Make the Road New York fear the arrest of Faisal Shahzad could slow or change the process for others hoping to gain citizenship.

"It's a very intense process and we are concerned that because this person was a naturalized citizen there are going to be efforts to try to make it become even more difficult," said Make the Road New York Executive Director Ana Maria Archila.

Shahzad was born in Pakistan. In April of 2009 he became a U.S. citizen after passing the criminal and national security background checks required. The government is reportedly looking at whether he lied during the application process which many here say is quite strict.

"The FBI does a background check on every single application, everyone has to be fingerprinted and if there is a delay in the process of more than six months between the moment of the fingerprints and the moment of the interview the fingerprints have to be repeated again," Archila said.

Before the September 11th attacks, the FBI only did random checks of applicants. Now, everyone who applies is scrutinized.

To apply for citizenship -- which costs over $700 -- candidates have to be legal permanent residents living in the U.S. for at least five years; three years if you're married to an American citizen. Potential candidates also have to know English and U.S. history. In addition, they need to show proof of their work, living and travel records before a face to face interview.

"You have to keep a record of the past five years where you lived, where you worked, where you went to school. You have to make sure you documented every time you moved from an address to the U.S. government," said Make the Road New York Youth Coordinator Natalia Aristizabal.

Aristizabal, a Colombian immigrant who became a naturalized citizen in 2008, says she's hoping the process will not become even more lengthy as a result of Shazad's arrest.

"I don't think it has nothing to do with the test or the fact that he passed it. I think it has to do with his mindset," Aristizabal said.

Still, the concern among many is whether any test can reveal what's really in someone's mind when so much could be at stake.
Residents, state officials, community organizers and labor leaders gathered in Jackson Heights on Thursday to support passage of The Wage Theft Prevention Act. The legislation would increase penalties and tighten enforcement of New York State laws protecting workers from nonpayment and underpayment of wages and make it easier for law-abiding businesses to remain competitive, according to state senators.

If a worker is not being paid minimum wage in New York State or if wages are stolen, the employee may take his or her employers to court. Current law allows an employee to collect back wages and to recuperate an additional 25 percent of all wages lost. The proposed law would increase that amount to 200 percent. It would also protect workers from retaliation by employers by forcing companies to pay $10,000 for each retaliatory offense. In addition, the law would make cases in which employers steal more than $10,000 for each retaliatory offense. In addition, the law would make cases in which employers steal more than $25,000 in wages felony offenses.

“The Wage Theft Prevention Act will put a real price tag on this kind of lawbreaking for the first time,” said Deborah Axt, deputy director of Make the Road New York. Axt works within the immigrant community and said many employees who are not paid minimum wage are taken advantage of because they are not citizens. Business owners hire illegal immigrants and avoid paying taxes and workers compensation and sometimes pay workers less than minimum wage, threatening to disclose their immigration status if they complain.

“They stalk the workers and attack them. The nephew of an employer knifed one of the employees we assist,” Axt said. She said New York falls behind other states like New Mexico and Arizona, which have better wage enforcement and more strict penalties.

However, according to Randy Maruca, director of the Arizona Department of Labor, another law, The Legal Arizona Workers Act, enforced by the state attorney general, may have something to do with the state’s overall compliance with minimum wage laws.

The Legal Arizona Workers Act, sometimes referred to as The Employer Sanctions Act, requires all employers to use an e-verification system, a free web-based service offered by the federal Department of Homeland Security to confirm the legal status of all new employees hired.

The system prevents illegal immigrants from obtaining jobs that are on the books and thus forces them to work for employers who generally don’t keep records. “When we have workers that are working under the table, it’s pretty difficult to enforce minimum wage standards, let alone that they don’t file the complaints to begin with,” Maruca said.

Maruca was surprised to learn of recent cases in Queens in which large chain supermarkets C-Town and Bravo were found to be paying workers less than minimum wage or in some cases, not paying them at all. He said that since his state enacted wage laws in 2007, employers have generally abided by them, fearing the wrath of penalties.

“We face mounting unfair competition from unscrupulous businesses in our neighborhoods who gain an advantage by paying less than the minimum wage and not paying overtime,” said Morton Sloan, president of Morton Williams Supermarkets, in a statement. “As the National Employment Law Project recently reported, more than $18.4 million is stolen each week from workers in New York City alone.” Those “savings” are often passed on to consumers.

In some cases, lawbreaking businesses keep records off the books, making it easier for illegal immigrants to avoid paying income taxes.

According to Maruca, immigration law and wage laws often impact each other. “I think clearly there’s an underground economy out there, we’d be silly to ignore that and I think with that underground economy those workers are hesitant to seek compliance,” he said.

While the proposed law may help protect workers from wage theft, further reforms are needed.

“Our immigration laws are broken — hurting our businesses and cities,” Mayor Mike Bloomberg said in a statement, after he learned of Arizona’s new immigration law, which will allow police officers in that state to detain people believed to be in the country illegally.

Acknowledging the relationship between immigration law and wage law the mayor said, “If more states begin to follow Arizona’s misguided new law, our national economy will pay a heavy price.”
ESL Classes In Danger Of Closing

By Tevah Platt
June 24, 2010

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. — Yngris Duran needs to speak English to get and maintain a job, to understand her kids, to speak with their teachers, to navigate American society and to feel a part of it, Ms. Duran has been taking English classes for several years at Make the Road New York, an advocacy center that provides adult education classes in Port Richmond.

She arrived at her last class of the season last week with a feast she’d cooked for her classmates— chicken, potato salad, and Dominican arroz con guandule — to celebrate the semester and its accomplishments.

But along with celebration came uncertainty. It’s unclear whether the classes will resume as scheduled in August, or be canceled altogether by a line in the proposed city budget that would eliminate all city-funded adult literacy programs under contract through the Department of Youth and Community Development.

Ms. Duran is one of more than 26 percent of Staten Islanders who speak a language other than English at home— according to figures from the last Census.

City budget negotiations enter the final round this week, with or without help from Albany or Washington, facing a deadline of June 30. Also candidates for the ax are senior centers, firehouses and libraries, and funding for jobs and social services and cultural organizations.

LOSING ‘OPPORTUNITY’

An estimated 275 Staten Islanders would lose the chance to study English this year at Make the Road’s Port Richmond office alone. Conservatively, adult education director Julie Quinton guessed the cut would impact about 1,000 adult students boroughwide.

The Jewish Community Center (JCC), which lost $500,000 last year of what had been the state’s only stream of funding for English as a Second Language classes, would also be impacted by city cuts; El Centro del Inmigrante, also in Port Richmond, will lose its ESL and GED classes as of Sept. 30, said board member Terry Troia.

“If [the city] takes away our class, we are going to lose the opportunity to be part of American society, and we won’t be able to help our children to improve their education and their futures,” said Ms. Duran, a native of the Dominican Republic whose primary reason for living in the U.S. is to afford a better life and education for her daughter and son.

Ms. Duran, who was granted a green card, immigrated to the United States on February 19, 2000, the day before her 25th birthday.

In her arms was her 2-year-old daughter, Arlene, a comfort against the heartache of leaving her mother, siblings and niece and the world she knew in the province of Santiago Rodriguez.

“The flight was delayed because it was snowing here, but I’d never seen snow, so my mind was empty about the situation,” said Ms. Duran last week, remembering the trip that separated her from her homeland but united her with her husband, a maintenance worker who at the time could afford to place his family in a one-room Manhattan apartment they shared with his friend.

They moved to Port Richmond in 2001.

“I love Staten Island because it’s like a little town,” said Ms. Duran. “But sometimes it’s very difficult. I need to improve my English to get a job. It’s totally necessary.”

Ms. Duran is looking for work, but she held a job previously at a warehouse, packing beauty supplies in Brooklyn. Despite an exhausting two-hour commute each way, Ms. Duran went to classes from 7 to 9 at El Centro del Inmigrante, also in Port Richmond.

PETITION SIGNING

Her current class of 30 at Make the Road meets for four hours on Tuesdays and Thursday nights. It’s one of six classes offered at the organization’s Port Richmond branch. Five of them will be cut if Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s proposed eliminations are approved, said adult educator Gabriela O’Leary, Ms. Duran’s teacher.

“If the mayor’s proposed cuts go through, thousands of students across the Island and the city would lose the opportunity to practice skills and develop confidence and comfort in the language that they need,” said Ms. O’Leary. “Perhaps even more significantly, these students would lose a vital space where community, dialogue, friendship, reflection, hope, and collective action all thrive. The ESL classroom is about so much more than learning new verbs and vocabulary. It’s a place where students work together to live with dignity in a new language and in a new community.”

Students at Make the Road have rallied at City Hall, written letters to City Council, and collected about 400 signatures on Staten Island for a petition to save the adult language courses.

“Sometimes my kids are having a conversation in English and I can’t understand them,” wrote Ms. Duran in one of the letters Make the Road students drafted in class. “It’s frustrating. I don’t want to be lost in my own family.”

“Our bosses, our government, hospitals, and immigration officials all tell us that English is necessary and that it’s the best way to push up our families and help the economy,” wrote Graciela Behari of Port Richmond, originally from Colombia.

“If we can’t learn English, we can’t get better jobs to help the economy grow,” said Guatemala native Carlos Castellanos of Port Richmond.

“We don’t want to face discrimination because we don’t speak English,” wrote Sotera Sanchez of Port Richmond, formerly from Mexico. “We need America and America needs us.”
Tratan plan para atacar el asma de NY

MANUEL E. AVENDAÑO/EDLP
2010-06-16

NUEVA YORK – Un plan piloto que contempla severas sanciones contra los dueños de edificios que no cumplan con la limpieza de sus inmuebles, será discutido a partir de hoy en audiencia pública como una forma de reducir los factores contaminantes vinculados al asma en la ciudad.

Durante la sesión del Concejo Municipal se escucharán diferentes testimonios de las partes involucradas en este persistente problema de salud que afecta a unos 400.000 neoyorquinos, en su mayoría niños.

El proyecto —que fue presentado a principios de mayo— establece un plan piloto en 175 edificios y requiere que los propietarios tomen todas las medidas necesarias para eliminar la basura, el moho y otros elementos relacionados con la enfermedad pulmonar.

La medida —coauspiciada por la concejal Rosie Méndez (D-Manhattan) considera que, en caso que el propietario no cumpla con las limpiezas, la ciudad se haría cargo de realizarlas pasando luego la cuenta al dueño por el trabajo realizado.

En declaraciones a este diario, la presidenta del Concejo Municipal, Christine Quinn, dijo ayer que Nueva York tiene muchos factores —como el tráfico y las ratas— que contribuyen al desarrollo del asma, especialmente entre los niños. “¿Por qué ha crecido este problema? No lo sé, pero vamos a hacer todo lo que podamos para reducirllo”, dijo Quinn.

La funcionaria señaló que los neoyorquinos tienen en sus viviendas “elementos que están más allá de su control que empeoran el asma” y que es necesario que los dueños de edificios se hagan responsables de esto.

Quinn indicó también que el plan piloto se enfocaría en las áreas donde hay mayor incidencia de la enfermedad y mayores violaciones de las regulaciones de vivienda, como Bushwick, Williamsburg, Greenpoint, Sur del Bronx y Harlem. “Nos concentremos en un centenar de edificios cada año”, explicó.

En cuanto a la queja que tienen los propietarios sobre la falta de cooperación de sus inquilinos, Quinn señaló que “puede haber algunos, pero no es la gran mayoría”.

La propuesta de ley ha sido bien recibida por activistas que velan por el bienestar en la vivienda.

“Este proyecto piloto es un paso adelante para combatir el asma que afecta tanto a nuestra comunidad”, dijo Javier Valdés, subdirector de “Se Hace Camino Nueva York”. “Esperamos que este plan sea llevado luego a un nivel más amplio”, agregó.
Activistas hambrientos contra Mike

CATALINA JARAMILLO
2010-06-04

NUEVA YORK — Un grupo de 209 líderes religiosos pidió al alcalde Michael Bloomberg detener la cooperación entre las autoridades federales de inmigración y el Departamento de Corrección de Nueva York, a cargo de la cárcel de Rikers Island, que ha provocado la deportación de 4.000 neoyorquinos cada año, según ellos.

En el segundo día de la huelga de hambre organizada por la organización pro inmigrante Se hace camino Nueva York y la Coalición Nuevo Santuario, en la que participan 40 personas, líderes religiosos y políticos acusaron al alcalde de tener una doble cara.

“La policía arresta a personas por infracciones menores y luego los deportan. Es un castigo muy injusto, que divide familias, y que es totalmente contra la ley. ¿Por qué Bloomberg no lo detiene? Bloomberg tiene una doble cara porque dice que adora a los inmigrantes pero no entiende estos casos”, explicó la reverendo Donna Schaper, de Judson Memorial Church.

Ana María Archila, co-directora de Se hace Camino NY, expresó que el ayuno es para llamar la atención a las contradicciones que se están expresando con las políticas de la ciudad.

“Bloomberg tiene un discurso muy progresista y pro inmigrante, pero al mismo tiempo tiene una política que permite a la agencia de inmigración acceder a la información de las cárceles de la ciudad, donde hay gente que está esperando para ir a corte y ponerlos en procesos de deportación, independientemente si son declarados culpables o no del crimen que los llevó a la cárcel”, dijo Archila.

También están participando en la huelga los concejales Ydanis Rodríguez, Melissa Mark-Viverito, Julissa Ferreras y Daniel Dromm.

Dromm aseguró que el alcalde siempre dice que la grandeza de esta ciudad está en sus inmigrantes, al mismo tiempo que fracasa protegiendo la dignidad de esas personas.

Hortencia Colorado, una artista de 70 años, nacida en Estados Unidos pero de padres mexicanos, cree que el ayuno sirve como un llamado de atención.

“Es una gotita. Y hay muchas gotitas ahorita cayendo en un espacio grande y se está llenando”, expresó Colorado.

“He visto demasiadas familias de amigos separados de sus hijos. Si yo estuviera en esa situación no sé qué haría. Así que el ayuno tres días, no es nada comparado con eso”, dijo Juan Carlos Ruiz, que estuvo indocumentado por ocho años.

Evelyn Erskine, vocera de la ciudad, manifestó: “El Departamento de Correcciones ha actuado para asegurar que los prisioneros inmigrantes sean conscientes de sus derechos legales cuando interactúan con agentes federales, incluyendo el derecho a rechazar una entrevista con oficiales de inmigración. Al mismo tiempo, la ciudad, consistentemente con sus obligaciones legales, coopera con el cumplimiento de la ley en asuntos criminales”.

Algumas de las personas que participan en el segundo día de la huelga de hambre. Foto: José A. Rivera/EDLP
La educación no se puede sacrificar

JULIE QUINTON Directora de educación para adultos, Se Hace Camino Nueva York.
June 4, 2010

En la tercera ceremonia de toma de juramento el alcalde Bloomberg se comprometió a formar una coalición bipartidista para la reforma migratoria que “defendería nuestros valores y estimularía la economía”.

Mientras que el debate de la reforma migratoria continúa, existen varias cosas que el alcalde Bloomberg puede hacer para apoyar la integración de inmigrantes en la ciudad.

No podemos endulzar los desafíos presupuestales que afronta. La pasividad en Albany y la dura atmósfera de la economía han forzado al alcalde a tomar decisiones muy difíciles con respecto al presupuesto. Pero las decisiones difíciles no siempre pueden ser a expensas de ayudar a los inmigrantes a integrarse a nuestra sociedad y economía. Los recortes a los programas de educación para adultos propuestos por el alcalde le harán más MAL que bien.

Los recortes tendrán costos dramáticos en nuestra economía.

Importantes estudios muestran que los programas de educación para adultos estimulan el crecimiento de la economía y que sus participantes contribuyen al mejoramiento de NY: el 72% de los estudiantes trabajan tiempo completo o medio tiempo. Los servicios de educación los mantienen en sus trabajos y les permiten contribuir a nuestra economía y base tributaria. Los estudios muestran que la educación mejora el empleo y los ingresos tanto como en un 30%. Igualmente, los programas de educación para adultos que Bloomberg quiere recortar ayudaron a cerca de 1,000 estudiantes el año pasado a encontrar trabajo, trayendo producción, ingresos en impuestos y ahorro en beneficios públicos a la ciudad.

El alcalde Bloomberg espera recortar cerca de $5.18 millones en fondos para estos servicios. Este recorte del 72% a los fondos actuales, dejará sin clases a 13,000 personas.

Ya antes de esta propuesta, la situación era grave.

Las clases de inglés y de GED disponibles en la ciudad, favorecen a menos del 5% de aquellos que necesitan ayuda en educación para adultos. 1.6 millones de jóvenes y adultos necesitan diplomas o GEDs y cientos de miles carecen del inglés necesario para navegar nuestros sistemas de salud y educación públicos, pagar las cuentas de servicios, leer el periódico, obtener el GED, acceder a entrenamiento laboral o a educación superior, participar en asuntos de la comunidad o pasar el examen de la ciudadanía.

Como maestra de inglés y directora de un programa de educación para adultos, sé cuán devastador será el impacto de los recortes para los estudiantes adultos que son el futuro de Nueva York. Les solicito al alcalde Bloomberg y al concejo municipal que reinstauren los fondos para la educación para adultos en el presupuesto del año fiscal 2011.
Indignación tras veredicto

CATALINA JARAMILLO

2010-05-08

Un grupo de oficiales electos, representantes de organizaciones de inmigrantes, de la comunidad LGBT, así como del gobierno ecuatoriano y la familia Sucuzhañay manifestaron ayer su descontento con el veredicto del jurado para Hakim Scott el frente a la corte de Brooklyn.

Christine Quinn, presidente del Concejo dijo: “Agradecemos al jurado por su servicio, pero con todo respeto, estuvieron muy equivocados. José Sucuzhañay fue asesinado porque Hakim Scott y Keith Phoenix no les gustó quien era o quien creyeron que era. Y lo atacaron por ninguna otra razón que por su odio por la comunidad gay y por el odio a la comunidad latina e inmigrante”.

De su lado la congresista Nydia Velazquez expresó: “Estoy comprometida para usar el peso de mi oficina para pedirle al secretario de justicia Eric Holder que haga una investigación para determinar si hubo violación de los derechos civiles de José Sucuzhañay y que se aplique el peso de la ley”.

Diego Sucuzhañay manifestó: “Nuestra familia todavía no puede entender cómo el jurado ha llegado a una conclusión de que el ataque de mis hermanos y el asesinato de José no fue motivado por el odio”. “El sistema judicial ha fallado de mandar un mensaje claro. Con esto es posible que motivemos más al odio. Es un veredicto equivocado. Esperamos que en el próximo veredicto el jurado no se equivoque”.

Ana María Archila, co-directora Se hace Camino NY indicó: “El sistema judicial falló en expresar que la violencia provocada por el odio no será tolerada en esta ciudad”.

Diego Sucuzhañay expresó su descontento porque no consideraron el cargo de crimen de odio contra uno de los atacantes de su hermano José. humberto arellano/edlp
ARIZONA AL ROJO VIVO

La controvertida ley de inmigración del estado sureno fue recibida con protestas, ahora pasa a las cortes—P2, 3 y 4

NUEVA YORK

Madre de Garza se aferró a la esperanza—P5
Demandan a ICE por información de programas anti-inmigrantes

CATALINA JARAMILLO
April 28, 2010

NUEVA YORK — Decenas de líderes de organizaciones que defienden los derechos de inmigrantes y de trabajadores, además de religiosos, se reunieron ayer frente al edificio federal de Inmigración en el Bajo Manhattan para condenar la ley SB 1070 de Arizona y para denunciar los programas en que la policía trabaja en colaboración con el Servicio de Inmigración y Aduanas (ICE).

“Lo que está pasando en Arizona no es una situación aislada, sino la continuación de una tendencia muy peligrosa que hemos visto en este país en los últimos dos años”, expresó Angela Fernández, directora ejecutiva de la Coalición del Alto Manhattan para los derechos del Inmigrante.

Tres organizaciones —Red Nacional de Jornaleros y Jornaleras (NDLON, por sus siglas en inglés), el Centro de Derechos Constitucionales (CCR) y la Clínica por Justicia Migratoria de la escuela de Derecho Benjamín N. Cardozo— explicaron que existen programas como ‘Comunidades Seguras’, el Programa de Extranjeros Criminales y 287(g), en los cuales la policía local colabora con ICE en 20 estados, gastando 100 millones de dólares, y de los cuales se tiene muy poca información.

Para conocer más de esos programas e informar a la comunidad, estas organizaciones hicieron una petición de información mediante la ley FOIA que obliga a los organismos públicos a entregar información. “Pero ellos no cumplieron, por lo que el 27 de abril pusimos una demanda contra ICE ante la corte del distrito sur de Nueva York”, explicó Morgan Russell de la escuela de derecho.

Los activistas exigieron que el Presidente Obama rechace la ley SB 1070 y termine con las detenciones y deportaciones, que ICE entregue información sobre estos programas y que la policía se encargue de proteger a nuestras comunidades en vez de romper familias.

“Hemos sabido que lo que está pasando en Arizona no es nada nuevo y ha estado ocurriendo hace años, específicamente con el Sheriff Joe Arpaio, básicamente criminalizando y persiguiendo específicamente a jornaleros inmigrantes, muchos de ellos indocumentados”, dijo Gonzalo Mercado, del Centro del Inmigrante en Staten Island.

Las organizaciones —entre las cuales estaba Se hace camino Nueva York, New Sanctuary Movement, Families for Freedom, Coalición de Inmigrantes de Nueva York, sindicato 32BJ, Center for Constitutional Rights y muchas más— hicieron un llamado a salir masivamente a la calle el 1 de mayo para exigirle al Presidente y al Congreso una reforma migratoria que evite que leyes como la de Arizona se sigan promulgando en otros estados por falta de una política federal.
Piden salarios dignos en el Queens Mall

JOSE ACOSTA

2010-04-26

NUEVA YORK — Espacios para la comunidad, salarios dignos y el derecho de los trabajadores a organizar un sindicato sin amenazas ni intimidación, fue lo que demandó ayer una coalición de organizaciones comunitarias al dueño del Queens Center Mall, Macerich Company.

Jeff Eichler, coordinador del Retail Organizing Project, dijo que la manifestación de ayer forma parte de la Campaña por Salarios Dignos que empezó con el Kingsbridge Armory en El Bronx, la cual busca que empresas como Macerich Company, que ha recibido más de $100 millones en exenciones de impuesto, devuelvan a la comunidad. “El Queens Center Mall, pese a las exenciones de impuesto que ha recibido, provee muy poco a la comunidad en términos de espacios comunitarios, el sueldo de los empleados ronda el salario mínimo, y los empleados que han tratado de organizarse han recibido amenaza e intimidación de parte de sus patrones”, dijo Eichler.

Guillermo Serper, de Se Hace Camino Nueva York, dijo que la coalición Queens Center Mall Campaign, QCMC, creada en diciembre de 2009, busca salarios justos para los empleados del centro comercial, de al menos $10 la hora.

Un estudio que dio a conocer en marzo Se Hace Camino Nueva York encontró que pese a que los dueños del centro comercial están recibiendo exención de impuestos, los 3,100 empleos que hay en el Queens Center Mall son remunerados con sueldos iguales o cercanos al mínimo federal de $7.25 la hora, y sin beneficios de salud.

Miembros de Se Hace Camino Nueva York durante la protesta ayer por mejores salarios para trabajadores del Queens Center Mall. José Acosta

Miembros de la coalición estaban ayer recolectando firmas en una petición para que el Queens Center Mall apoye además a la comunidad proporcionándole espacios de bajo costo, para que las organizaciones locales puedan brindar servicios, tales como capacitación laboral para jóvenes y adultos, clases de inglés como segundo idioma y asesoría financiera.

Frank García, uno de los empleados del centro comercial, dijo que lleva tres años ganando $8 la hora, por lo que ha tenido que buscarse otro empleo de media jornada para poder mantener a su familia. “Este Mall hace mucho dinero, pero a los empleados no nos nos pagan lo justo”, dijo García, quien prefirió mencionar el nombre de la tienda donde trabaja.

Llamadas a Macerich Company no fueron contestadas al cierre. Sin embargo, durante una reunión hace dos semanas con la coalición, representantes del centro comercial informaron que estaban dispuestos a escuchar las demandas de la comunidad, según informó Julissa Bisono, de la QCMC.
Reclaman acciones concretas al presidente Barack Obama

25 Apr 2010

CATALINA JARAMILLO

NUEVA YORK — Un grupo de inmigrantes se reunieron ayer en la sede de Se hace camino Nueva York en Queens para manifestar su tristeza e indignación por la ley que criminaliza a los inmigrantes en Arizona.

"Esta ley legaliza el racismo, rompe la confianza entre la comunidad y el gobierno y manda una clara señal a los latinos y los trabajadores: no somos bienvenidos, este país no es nuestro", expresó Ana María Archila, co directora de Se hace Camino Nueva York.

La dirigente agregó que esta no era la señal que estaban esperando cuando el voto latino ayudó a elegir a Barack Obama como presidente o a darle una mayoría al partido Demócrata en el Congreso.

"Estamos aquí para expresar nuestra rabia, nuestra pena", alcanzó a decir Archila antes de quebrarse y romper en llanto. "No podemos ni poner en palabras la clase de insulto que esta ley significa para nuestra comunidad", agregó al componerse.

Archila culpó a Obama y al gobierno federal por no haber tomado ninguna acción en favor de la reforma migratoria en 15 meses, lo que ha permitido el espacio para leyes como la de Arizona, dijo.

"Presidente Obama, ¿Dónde está usted?", se preguntó Archila.

Los inmigrantes, documentados e indocumentados, reunidos en Queens ayer manifestaron lo que para ellos ha significado esta ley en Arizona. Las palabras más repetidas fueron crueldad, indignación, coraje, pena, impotencia, dolor y frustración.

La directora de la Coalición de Inmigrantes de Nueva York, Chung-Wha Hong, también condenó la legislación diciendo que la gobernadora Jan Brewer ha convertido su estado en una desgracia nacional.

"Obama necesita preguntarse a sí mismo si hizo algo que permitiera este escenario. Y yo creo que la respuesta es que sí", manifestó Hong a EL DIARIO/LA PRENSA.

Las dirigentes están exigiendo una acción concreta del presidente Obama antes del 1 de mayo, cuando se realizará una marcha masiva en Foley Square en Manhattan.

Además, la Coalición de Inmigrantes convocó a una marcha para protestar contra la ley de Arizona este martes al mediodía en 26 Federal Plaza (Broadway entre las calles Worth y Duane).
Velázquez pide acción en inmigración

20 Apr 2010

ANNIE CORREAL

NUEVA YORK — La representante Nydia Velázquez, demócrata de Nueva York, se reunió anoche con miembros de la organización comunitaria Se Hace Camino Nueva York en una escuela en Bushwick para impulsarlos a hacer un llamado al Presidente Barack Obama y los congresistas demócratas para presentar una reforma migratoria antes de mayo. “El tiempo está corriendo y la ventana que tenemos es estrecha si queremos pasar una reforma”, aseguró Velázquez en una entrevista telefónica con EL DIARIO/LA PRENSA antes del evento, en el Bushwick High School.

“Es un llamado de urgencia porque si no tenemos legislación a partir de mayo, vamos a tener la cabeza contra las campañas de elecciones congresionales”, explicó.

Si no se da una reforma migratoria este año, los congresistas demócratas podrían perder votos latinos en las elecciones para el Congreso, que tendrán lugar el 2 de noviembre.

Después de la marcha migratoria del 21 de marzo, el senador Charles Schumer, demócrata de Nueva York, planteó los puntos básicos de una reforma migratoria junto con el senador Lindsey Graham, republicano de Carolina del Sur, en un editorial que se publicó en el periódico Washington Post.

Sin embargo, no se ha presentado legislación en el Senado.

Javier Valdés, un organizador en Se Hace Camino, afirmó: “Los senadores verdaderamente no han introducido un proyecto de ley y pensamos que es importante que se introduzca este año como prometió Obama. Entonces, la idea es educar miembros de nuestra comunidad sobre que pueden hacer para que se apruebe una reforma”.

“Tenemos que activar nuestra base para que sigan haciendo llamadas a sus congresistas”, subrayó la congresista Velázquez.
Claman rescate hospitalario

CATALINA JARAMILLO

2010-04-17

NUEVA YORK — A partir de julio la Corporación de Hospitales y Salud de Nueva York (HHC, por sus siglas en inglés) enfrenta un déficit de mil millones de dólares y desde entonces podría verse obligado a cerrar servicios y despedir hasta 26.000 trabajadores.

Para evitarlo, decenas de líderes y miembros del sistema de salud, activistas y organizaciones comunitarias se reunieron ayer en el Hospital Bellevue, en Manhattan, para pedirle a los oficiales electos que presione al congreso estatal a darles los fondos necesarios.

"Los hospitales de HHC son los que apoyan más a los inmigrantes. Tienen una práctica de puertas abiertas para todos sin importar el estatus migratorio, sin importar que no tengan seguro médico y son las que más a fondo han tomado las leyes de asistencia financiera", explicó Juanita Lara, de la rama de salud de Se hace camino Nueva York.

Según HHC, sus 11 hospitales, seis centros de tratamiento y diagnóstico y sus más de 80 clínicas comunitarias atendieron a más de 450.000 pacientes sin seguro médico en 2009. La Comisión del Sistema de Salud Público informó que la HHC entrega el 66% de las atenciones no ambulatorias de pacientes sin seguro médico en todo Nueva York.

"El único acceso real a atención médica de bajo costo que tienen los indocumentados en Staten Island es a través de HHC. Si estos cortes de presupuesto suceden, inmigrantes podrían morir", dijo la reverendo Terry Troia.

En otros condados, el cierre de servicios implicaría que los pacientes indocumentados o sin seguro médico, tendrían que viajar distancias más largas para ser atendidos, lo que en algunos casos arriesgaría su salud.

"El peligro es muy grande para todos", agregó Lara, de Se hace camino.

Una de las causas del déficit, explicó Moira Dolan del sindicato DC 37, es que Medicare les reembolsa menos de lo que a ellos les cuesta atender a las personas. Por ejemplo, dijo, si una visita les cuesta $250, Medicare les devuelve $100. En el caso de los pacientes sin seguro, no hay devolución.

"El presupuesto preliminar nos está cortando $70 millones. Queremos que no nos apliquen ese recorte y que nos den al menos $300 millones adicionales, que están disponibles a través del fondo de Medicare llamado Disproportionate Share", manifestó Dolan. Este fondo lo entrega Medicare para compensar a hospitales por los costos de atender a pacientes de bajo ingreso. "El estado puede autorizar esos fondos, que son federales", agregó Dolan.
‘Me lo discriminan por ser gay’
Madre de mexicano acusa a la policía de omitir denuncia sobre ataque de odio

CATALINA JARAMILLO

2010-04-08

NUEVA YORK — Ricardo Muñiz iba saliendo de una fiesta con dos amigos en julio del año pasado en Brooklyn cuando según su versión dos sujetos los empezaron a perseguir, insultar y luego los golpearon por ser gay. Muñiz dijo en su declaración que fue agredido a golpes de bate y de cinturón, por lo que fue a dar al hospital. Ese mismo día hizo la denuncia por crimen de odio a la policía, sin embargo su madre dijo que la policía no hizo caso a su declaración sino a la de uno de los agresores, José Cruz, que dijo que fue a él a quien le pegaron injustificadamente. Muñiz lleva ocho meses en la cárcel de Rikers Island y enfrenta deportación por un crimen que él dice que no cometió.

"Está preso injustamente, nada más por ser homosexual", aseguró Jorjelina Aguirre, madre de Muñiz, ayer en frente de la Corte Suprema de Brooklyn donde había una audiencia programada.

Su madre y un grupo de amigos y activistas LGBT de Se hace camino Nueva York se manifestaron afuera de la corte pidiendo al fiscal Charles Hynes justicia.

"Vinimos de México a este país buscando un lugar seguro, ya que en mi país me lo molestaban, golpeaban y hostigaban por causa de su sexualidad, y pensamos que los Estados Unidos iban a ser un mejor lugar para que él viviera su sexualidad plenamente. Desgraciadamente ese no fue el caso”, explicó la madre que teme que deporten a su hijo y tenga que volverse solo a México donde es discriminado.

Sin embargo, la policía dice que la historia fue distinta. Cruz hizo una declaración donde dijo que siete hombres habían salido de un auto, lo habían acuchillado y golpeado en la cara. La policía lo encontró en el lugar del crimen con heridas graves y lo trasladó al hospital Kings County donde se le indujo un coma y donde permaneció por "varias semanas". Según Carlos Nieves, vocero de la policía, los detectives comenzaron la investigación y el 6 de agosto arrestaron a Muñiz, y el 17 de octubre a Danny Valdés, y les dieron cargos de asalto en primer, segundo y tercer grado. "La historia de Muñiz no era consistente con las declaraciones de todos los testigos, que dijeron que fue él quien golpeó a Cruz en el bar”, dijo Nieves.

Karina Claudio, activista por los derechos LGBT de Se hace camino, dice que esa versión no es la real y que lo que pasó fue que en la pelea ambos cayeron al suelo y Cruz se golpeó y dijo que fue atacado.

"Ambas comunidades (hispana y gay) son víctimas de odio y no reportan los crímenes de odio porque tienen miedo de que la policía misma sea homofóbica. Y en este caso hemos visto la doble discriminación. Por ser indocumentado y por ser homosexual le han virado el caso y se han torcido los papeles”, explicó Claudio.

Yoni y Isaías Muñiz, de 20 y 22 años respectivamente, dijeron que estar muy tristes por la injusticia cometida contra su hermano mayor, que siempre ha sido un ejemplo para ellos.

La audiencia fue postergada hasta el 5 de mayo, fecha en que se decidirá cuando comienza el juicio. Muñiz, de 24 años, es representado en la corte por el abogado Deron Castro, que estaba fuera del país y fue reemplazado ayer por Mahmoud Rabah que no habló con la prensa.
COLUMNISTA INVITADO

Necesitamos una reforma financiera fuerte

5 Apr 2010

Por FREDDY CASTIBLANCO, dueño de Terraza 7 Café y miembro de Se Hace el Camino Nueva York.

Como inmigrante y microempresario en Nueva York, pienso mucho en las posibilidades para mantener y hacer crecer mi restaurante. Para ganarme la vida, dependo de que mi negocio sea próspero, y el acceso a crédito, como préstamos a corto y largo plazo, es vital. La semana pasada, finalmente, se dieron pasos para reformar nuestro sistema financiero disfuncional, y pronto todo el senado lo debatirá y votará a favor o en contra. Las pequeñas empresas deben continuar presionando para que se dé una reforma financiera fuerte que asegure que otra crisis causada por la codicia en Wall Street no arrase con estas y nuestras comunidades.

Aún con una reforma cada día más débil, la Cámara de Comercio de los Estados Unidos, dice que el proyecto de ley de la reforma financiera, en discusiones en el senado, limitará el crédito para la pequeña empresa. Quiero ser claro: la Cámara de Comercio no habla por mí. De hecho, el status quo que defiende la cámara, es lo que ocaprioridad sionó el actual colapso financiero en primer lugar. Nada ha limitado tanto mi acceso a crédito como la crisis actual. Unas reglas de préstamo razonables y mejor vigilancia de los bancos podrían haberle ahorrado al país muchos problemas de crédito, sin mencionar miles de millones en ayudas financieras.

Una nueva encuesta realizada por la Alianza Main Street muestra que la mayoría de los microempresarios que se encuestaron están a favor de un organismo de control fuerte y enfocado para vigilar las prácticas de préstamos de los bancos, las tarjetas de crédito y otro tipo de préstamos a consumidores. El organismo de control propuesto, la Agencia de Protección Financiera del Consumidor (en inglés, Consumer Financial Protection Agency, o CFPA) ya se ha vuelto de más limitado alcance que lo que originalmente se propuso.

Los senadores en Washington tienen que estar del lado de la pequeña empresa, garantizar que se apruebe una reforma financiera fuerte y que los intereses de la comunidad sean una para la toma de decisiones. La industria financiera tiene miles de representantes haciendo presión en Washington para debilitar esta propuesta de ley y evitar la independencia en la protección al consumidor. Por eso es que nuestras voces deben elevarse y escucharse en este debate. De otra forma, los grandes bancos podrían salirse otra vez con la suya, a pesar del hecho de que la falta de regulaciones resultó siendo mala no solo para los consumidores y contribuyentes y la pequeña empresa, sino también para los propios bancos.

Mientras tanto, los microempresarios como yo cruzamos los dedos para que podamos continuar por más tiempo con tarjetas de crédito y determinación. No podemos esperar otro año para una verdadera reforma financiera. Los microempresarios necesitamos que Washington defienda una verdadera reforma financiera que ayude a nuestras comunidades a prosperar una vez más.