

## The National Sanctuary Collective/Colectivo Santuario



Thursday, February 2, 2023

The White House  
Office of the Vice President  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Honorable Vice President Kamala Harris,

We write as undocumented people who have taken sanctuary in houses of worship, along with faith leaders who have supported us with our journeys. We respectfully write hoping to share our stories with your administration and to ask you to listen to us and then use your power with either the Senate majority to create a pathway to freedom or to compel President Biden to get involved and do what it will take to set us free.

In two years, we will face the results of another election. Our livelihoods, families, lives, and peace of mind depend totally on those results. Today, our lives and the lives of so many other undocumented citizens are in your hands. We don't know where else to turn. Vice President Harris, we ask that you meet with us and help us find a path to citizenship. We are honest, hardworking, tax-paying, family-oriented people who contribute to the growth of our nation. We are asking for a chance to be documented citizens of the US. Let us help you make this country truly a land of the free as we live into the pledge of "liberty and justice for all."

We understand you have been given the challenging task of immigration reform and believe each of us has a story that should influence immigration policy because our lives tell the story of humanity and dignity, two things needed to fix our broken and inhumane immigration system in the US.

For personal reasons, each of us migrated to this country individually seeking safety and freedom. The collective fear and insecurity during Trump's administration forced us to take sanctuary within houses of worship. We put our trust in the historical tradition of faith communities stepping up and sheltering the oppressed during times of uncertainty and injustice. In the spirit of Rev. Dr. King, we also have a dream – a dream of living a life without the fear of being detained and deported. We dream that the immigration policy will recognize us as citizens who contribute to our communities rather than being a burden.

All of us have a story we wish to share with you. As Albert Einstein, a notable immigrant, so wisely said, "Information is not knowledge. The only source of knowledge is experience." We have that experience and hope to speak up and speak out not only for ourselves but for the millions of other people like us who have been forced into the shadows by a broken and often unjust immigration system.

All of us have spent years of our lives living in a sanctuary separated from family and communities. Many of our children were also forced to uproot their lives and live in sanctuary for years. While most of us have been able to temporarily leave sanctuary under President Biden's administration, some of us still have not. All of us live with constant fear and trauma. All of us live with the knowledge that any shift in the governing of this country could send us back into sanctuary. Because of this knowledge, this fear, this uncertainty, we want you to hear our stories and use your power with either the Senate majority to create a pathway to freedom or to compel President Biden to do what it will take to set us free.

We have all sought out the legal pathways available to us in our search for citizenship at great expense and to no avail. Eight of us have inspired members of Congress to file private bills on our behalf with the House Judiciary Committee. However, none of them were able to use their power, even with a Democratic House majority, to move the private bills through the judiciary. The rest of us have not been able to move our often-conservative representatives to hear our stories, much less file a private bill on our behalf.

Vice President Harris, our allies met in person with your senior staff members when you were a senator. They also met with senior staff members of Senators Elizabeth Warren and Cory Booker and were informed that private bills will not work in the Senate. We need your help! We are willing to come to Washington and testify on our behalf or we could meet with you via Zoom. We want you to hear our stories, to hear our children's stories, and talk parent to parent, sibling to sibling, human being to human being.

We are turning to you now, after years of disappointment and pain to offer our stories. We hope that after hearing our stories of the trauma that has been inflicted in our homelands as well as by the US government, you will be moved to fight for a more just immigration policy.

We have included brief bios of who we are:

<https://austinsanctuarynetwork.org/sanctuary-collective-leaders/>

Thank you for seeing our humanity and using your power to save our lives.

Faithfully,

Miriam Vargas Rodriguez  
Columbus, Ohio

Rev. Sally Padgett  
First Lutheran Church of Columbus

Juana Tobar Ortega  
Asheboro, North Carolina

Father Randall J. Keeney  
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church

Rosa Sabido  
Mancos, Colorado

Rev. Craig Paschal  
Mancos United Methodist Church

Firelly Rios  
Amesbury, Massachusetts

Rev. Joan MacPherson  
Main St. Congregational Church, UCC

Hilda Ramirez  
Austin, Texas

Rev. Jim Rigby  
St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Lucio Pérez Ortis  
Amherst, Massachusetts

Rev. Vicki Kemper, pastor  
First Congregational Church, UCC

Maria Merida  
Lynn, Massachusetts

Rev. John E. Gibbons  
First Parish Bedford Unitarian Universalist

Francisca Lino  
Romeoville, Illinois

Rev. Emma Lozano  
Lincoln United Methodist Church

Rosa Gutiérrez López  
Bethesda, Maryland

Rev. Abhi Janamanchi  
Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church

Alirio Gamez  
Austin, Texas

Rev. Chris Jimmerson  
First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin

Edith Espinal  
Columbus, Ohio

Rev. Joel Miller  
Columbus Mennonite Church

Ingrid Encalada Latorre  
Boulder, Colorado

Rev. David Schwartz  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Boulder

Vicky Chávez  
Salt Lake City, Utah

Rev. Ian White Maher  
First Unitarian Church of Salt Lake City

Maria Chavalán Sut  
Charlottesville, Virginia

Rev. Matt Seaton  
Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church

Abbie Arevelo Herrera  
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Rev. Sherman Z. Logan, Jr.  
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Rev. Margaret Sawyer  
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Joan Gregory, Colectivo Organizer  
First Unitarian Church of Salt Lake City

Rev. Charlene Belsom Zellmer, MDiv  
Interfaith Minister

Peggy Morton, Colectivo Organizer  
First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin