

El Centro, Inc.

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10AM St. John the Evangelist Church, 2910 Strong Avenue, Kansas City, KS 66106

STRIVE Act Provides Framework for Comprehensive Immigration Reform *Faith, Business, and Immigrant Organizations Celebrate Introduction and Call on Congress to Act Quickly*

Kansas City, KS –On Thursday, March 22, 2007, a bipartisan bill to comprehensively reform our nation's immigration laws will be introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives. The STRIVE (Security Through Regularized Immigration and a Vibrant Economy) Act of 2007 provides for enhanced border and interior enforcement, improved verification of work authorization, an earned path to citizenship for some undocumented immigrants, a new worker program to meet our nation's economic needs, family reunification, and integration measures. As the bill is introduced in Congress, representatives of faith, business, organized labor, and immigrant organizations in Kansas City are coming together to call on the Kansas Congressional delegation to support bipartisan solutions to our nation's broken immigration system. "We know that the United States needs family reunification, an earned path to citizenship for hard-working immigrant workers, an essential immigrant worker program that protects all workers' rights, humane and effective border and interior enforcement, and strategies for integrating immigrants fully into our communities. While the STRIVE Act is not perfect, it represents a real opportunity to turn frustration with the broken status quo into lasting solutions in the best interest of America. Congress now has the framework for reform, and we call on our delegation to take decisive, bipartisan, swift action," stated Mary Lou Jaramillo, President/CEO of El Centro, Inc.

The organizations will gather at 10AM St. John the Evangelist Church at 2910 Strong Avenue, Kansas City, KS 66106, one hour after the introduction of the legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives. The Church is located in the Argentine neighborhood, long a first arrival point for immigrants and the site of the first of last year's historic immigrant rallies. "The late Martin Luther King spoke of the concept of the *Beloved Community* as an inclusive and interracial society characterized by freedom and justice for all. When it comes to immigration reform it would do our country well to resurrect Dr. King's concept of a *Beloved Community* and see how we might apply to the times in which we live. We represent different constituencies, but we are all united in our support for comprehensive immigration reform. As faith leaders, we view immigration as a crucial moral and family value issue. Our current policies are tearing families apart, keeping immigrants in the shadows, and creating fear and chaos both along the border and in our communities. Our immigrant brothers and sisters deserve a fair chance at the American dream, and the citizens in our congregations deserve an immigration system that is rational, fair, and humane.

We are praying that this is the year for comprehensive immigration reform, and we look to Congress to make it happen sooner rather than later as together we create a *Beloved Community*,” declared Father Pat Murphy, Animator of Hispanic Ministry for the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas.

“Business leaders demand comprehensive immigration reform that will put long-time immigrants who are important parts of our economy on a real path to citizenship. We also view as key the creation of a work visa program that will enable us to legally hire immigrant workers needed in the current and future labor market. We will continue to be part of the discussion around comprehensive immigration reform to make sure the concerns of business are addressed and that immigration reform equips us to continue our work generating economic growth and prosperity here in America’s heartland,” vowed Henry Sandate, Chairman of the Board of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Greater Kansas City. Also joining Sandate in representing the business community will be a local business owner whose frustration with difficulties in legally hiring needed workers spurred him to work for comprehensive immigration reform.

The Jewish Community Relations Bureau/American Jewish Committee is taking a stand on comprehensive immigration reform from both a faith and a civil rights perspective. “We need to fix our broken immigration system because it is the just and right thing to do. Jews have a rich tradition of immigration and a strong belief in welcoming the stranger. We call on Congress to take the necessary steps to address the problems and on our fellow Kansans to engage in a civil and reasonable debate on immigration reform. We cannot continue in the status quo, with increasing repression against immigrants, superheated anti-immigrant rhetoric, and real frustration with the symptoms of the problems,” said Judy Hellman, Associate Director of the AJC-JCRB.

Organized labor is expected to play an important role in passing comprehensive immigration reform in the new Democratic-controlled Congress. Sherwin Carroll, President of the Service Employees International Union Local 1, said, “We will judge all proposals for immigration reform by the following criteria: is it workable, is it comprehensive, does it provide a path to citizenship, does it protect all workers’ rights, does it reunite families, does it enhance our security, and does it promote integration? As the negotiations go forward in this Congress, we will work for legislation that achieves these goals. We know that the window of political opportunity is short, with the Presidential primaries looming, and so we are not wasting any time in coming together to fight for comprehensive reform. The solution is clear and the time is now!”

After an explanation of the STRIVE Act, short statements from the faith, business, labor, and immigrant organizations assembled, and testimonials from immigrant families and business owners about the need for reform, participants will answer questions about the legislation, the implications for Kansas City, and upcoming activities in the campaign for comprehensive immigration reform.

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