

# Unions, immigrant rights groups renew push for reform

Fed up with congressional refusal to tackle comprehensive immigration reform, the AFL-CIO launched a national petition campaign to demand President Barack Obama take executive action to address growing concerns about the country's immigration system, and to help a growing number of refugee children from Central America who are fleeing violence and terror.

The petition — available on the federation's website at [www.aflcio.org](http://www.aflcio.org) — was sent to more than 50 member unions and hundreds of allied organizations.

On July 23, the Oregon AFL-CIO joined a coalition of organizations at a press conference outside the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services field office in Northwest Portland to make their voices heard. The coalition included representatives from Causa Oregon, the American Friends Service Committee, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Center for Intercultural Organizing, and the farmworkers union PCUN.

"I want the president to hear this," said Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain. "We supported him; we saw the actions he took to help workers; we see what he's doing to raise wages; but it's not enough until we help all working people in this country; it's not enough while 11 million people are working in the shadows and children



**Tom Chamberlain, president of the Oregon AFL-CIO, joins with immigrant and community groups at a press conference outside the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) field office in Northwest Portland, where the organizations called on President Barack Obama to use his executive powers to implement comprehensive immigration reform.**

are overwhelming a system with no means to support them. He must take this on."

Chamberlain said there are 160,000 undocumented immigrants currently living in Oregon.

David Fidanque, executive director of ACLU of Oregon, said that under U.S. laws and international human rights agreements, children fleeing violence and human trafficking in Central

America have a right to seek asylum in the United States.

"Once those children reach the U.S., they also have a right to have their case heard in a fair process consistent with our Constitution," he said. "No child should be deported without a fair hearing before an immigration judge — and that means the child should have an attorney to represent them in that hearing."

Kayse Jama, executive director of the Center for Intercultural Organizing explained that refugees — especially children — who are fleeing countries where laws are not enforced and rights are not upheld, don't know to advocate for themselves.

"We must have the resources in place to help these kids — and we must change our views, as a country, of the immigrants and refugees who are coming here because they seek the same opportunities that I did when I came here, and that your families did when they came to this country. We are a country of immigrants. It's time to remember that, and to show compassion to our future neighbors," she said.

The AFL-CIO and the rest of organized labor have long campaigned for comprehensive immigration reform that would put undocumented people on a path to legalization and eventually citizenship. It also would bring the undocumented under federal labor law protection as soon as they registered for provisional "blue cards." That would lessen their exploitation, let unions organize them, and reduce the capability of employers to threaten to fire workers and hire undocumented replacements to stop union organizing drives.

The U.S. Senate passed comprehensive immigration reform last year, but the GOP-run House refuses to even consider it. That is why the national

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OREGON AFL-CIO PRESIDENT  
TOM CHAMBERLAIN

AFL-CIO launched the petition campaign.

Foes of immigration reform say the undocumented take away U.S. jobs. Trumka says that's wrong.

"We stand up for immigrant rights because there are jobs on the table — like the 800,000 new jobs created by immigration reform. We fight like hell for every single one," Trumka said. "Immigration is about work, about making a better life."

Supporters of executive action note that in 2012, Obama was able to stop the deportation of hundreds of thousands of undocumented young adults under the program known as DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). The idea is that a program like DACA — only bigger — would allow the millions more of undocumented immigrants to work legally in the U.S. without having to fear expulsion from the country.

(Editor's Note: Press Associates Inc. contributed to this report.)

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