

WHAT ARE WORKER CENTERS?

Worker centers mediate and address real problems in communities around the country. They:

- Foster positive relations between new immigrants and the larger communities in which they live and work. They help integrate low-wage immigrants into American civic life and facilitate collective deliberation, education and action.
- Mediate relationships between new immigrants and government agencies.
- Significantly alleviate common public health and safety issues associated with the day laborer phenomenon.
- Prevent labor and civil rights abuses, improve working conditions and recover unpaid wages. They monitor and enforcement the minimum wage, overtime, health and safety and other employment laws.

Worker Centers pursue their mission through a combination of approaches:

- **Service delivery**, including legal representation to recover unpaid wages; ESL classes; worker rights education; access to health clinics; bank accounts and loans.
- **Advocacy**, including researching and releasing exposes about conditions in low wage industries; lobbying for new laws and changes in existing ones; working with government agencies to improve monitoring and grievance processes.
- **Organizing**, building ongoing organizations and engaging in leadership development among workers to take action on their own behalf for economic and political change.

As of 2005, there are at least 140 workers centers, in over 80 U.S. cities, towns, and rural areas.

Day labor worker centers were developed as a solution to the concerns about informal street hiring. A 2006 report identified 63 day labor worker centers around the country.

- Day labor worker centers bring order to the often-chaotic competition of work in public right of ways or parking lots. Jobs are distributed in an orderly manner and workers comply with their own rules and regulations.
- Centers ensure the satisfaction of employers by assigning responsible, reliable, honest, and hardworking employees.
- Centers are a safer and more humane alternative where willing employers meet willing employees.

Worker centers face extinction under certain immigration proposals in Congress.

As described on the other side of this sheet, certain provisions of immigration reform proposals would destroy worker centers.

Immigration reform should not include eliminating the institutions that have been most successful in bringing order and dignity to a chaotic situation.

NOTE: These points are taken from a larger study of worker centers by Janice Fine entitled *Worker Centers: Organizing at the Edge of the Dream* Cornell University Press, 2006 and a January 2006 report by Abel Valenzuela, Jr., Nik Theodore, Edwin Meléndez, and Ana Luz Gonzalez entitled, *On The Corner: Day Labor in the United States*.

Current federal immigration proposals would make a bad situation worse. They would destroy the very institutions in our communities that have developed real solutions.

EFFECT OF PROVISIONS SPECIFICALLY TARGETING WORKER CENTERS IN HR 4437:

- **Day labor centers (and the private individuals, churches and government agencies who work with them) could face thousands or even millions of dollars in fines** if they assist in the process of connecting day laborers with employers. [Section 705]
- **The trust day labor centers have built with communities would be eroded as the centers become responsible for verifying workers' immigration status.** [Section 705]
- **Already scarce funding options for centers would be further limited** by a provision preventing cities from enacting ordinances that require businesses, such as Home Depot stores to provide funding or support to day labor centers. [Section 708]

Here are just a few examples of how provisions of current immigration proposals would hurt worker centers and the communities they serve:

- **Volunteers and staff of worker centers would be turned into criminals and worker center property could be seized.**
- **Good work, such as providing ESL classes and job skills training or leadership development would be equated with alien smuggling.**

One provision would make criminals of the millions of family members, employers, friends, social service providers, worker centers, churches and religious institutions, lawyers and others who provide assistance, services, advice or even a ride to undocumented people. All of these people could be prosecuted as criminals and their property could be seized.

- **Positive community relations and relations with government agencies would become strained as community members are turned into felons.**
- **Increased alienation and hopelessness among communities—particularly among youth— as they find themselves criminals simply because of their immigration status.**

One provision makes it a felony simply to be in the country without lawful immigration status.

- **Positive relationships built over time with the police would be replaced by wariness and fear as police become responsible for enforcing immigration laws.**

Many police departments have spent years nurturing the trust of immigrant communities. This will be lost through current proposals which enable local police to act as immigration agents.

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