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Tuesday, 20 April 2021 14:13

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Voces de la Frontera Action Green Bay and others held a demonstration to kick off their May Day worker's march for COVID-19 relief.

GREEN BAY, WI - Luis Galvan was nervous to speak in front of the crowd gathered at the Brown County Courthouse steps on Sunday, April 18. Galvan spoke briefly, but with passion, about working in the dairy industry throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as an essential immigrant worker.

"I got sick but I was not allowed to stop," said Galvan, "because no matter what, I had to provide for my family."

Galvan said he has tried to fix his citizenship status but has been unable to, and he is now asking for the government to provide a pathway to citizenship and aid for essential workers.

"I did not receive any help from the government," said Galvan.

Galvan was one of the speakers at the demonstration hosted by the Green Bay chapter of Voces de la Frontera, a community organization led by low-wage workers, immigrants, and

youth to protect and expand worker protections and rights statewide.

Brown County and the surrounding area have an estimated 15,000 undocumented immigrants. Wisconsin was home to nearly 300,000 immigrants as of 2016 with 115,747 people who live with at least one undocumented family member.

The demonstration was hosted by VDLF's political action arm, Voces de la Frontera Action , which focuses its attention on lobbying and advocating while endorsing candidates who fight for immigrant and racial justice, labor justice, and education rights.

VLDFA kicked off its essential workers' initiative this past week with Green Bay's event as one of many stops along VLFDA's route. VLDFA made stops in Kenosha, La Crosse, Wisconsin Dells, Madison, Waukesha, Wausau, Lake Geneva, Racine, Sheboygan, and Milwaukee.

The demonstrations were held in preparation for VDLFA's expedition to Washington D.C. planned for May Day — also known as International Workers Day.

The Trump Administration's dismal actions against the immigrant community were highlighted at the event, but presenters looked forward and demanded action now.

"We are showing up now to demand that President Biden follow through on his promise to pass immigration reform and dismantle institutionalized racism in his first 100 days in office," VDLFA said in a statement.



Currently, Biden's campaign promises are slow to arise and the continued mishandling of the border crisis and asylum seekers leaves more to be desired from the immigration reform community, but essential workers do not have time to wait and see if promises will be kept.

VLDFA will be sending upwards of 40 delegates from Wisconsin to lobby alongside the Fair Immigration Rights Movement (FIRM) Network, of which VDLFA is a founding member.

At the beginning of next month, VDLFA will continue its demands directly by marching on Senator Ron Johnson's Milwaukee office in May in tandem with the trek to the nation's capital.

The campaign's demands include a pathway to citizenship for all, essential worker COVID-19 support, and providing a route for issuing driver's licenses to undocumented workers.

Wisconsin has been debating issuing driver's licenses to undocumented people for years and Chief Andrew Smith of the Green Bay Police Department has been a vocal supporter .

"It is very important to recognize the hard work and the critical nature of the immigrants in Green Bay," said Smith, who was at the Sunday demonstration alongside GBPD Commander Kevin Warych.

Jose Antonio Lozano, an essential worker and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient who lives in the Fox Valley area, said when he was growing up his ethnicity didn't get in the way of his childhood until he needed to start applying for jobs and drivers licenses.

"The system still fails to offer us the same rights and privileges as the generation of Americans we grew alongside," said Lozano.

Now as an adult, Lozano is working to bring awareness about the conditions the immigrant community in Green Bay faces as well as the barriers to access they endure.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has decimated industries that rely on immigrant labor. Nearly seventy percent of workers deemed essential in the past year are undocumented and work in industries that face harsh and deadly conditions.

“We are here awaiting yet another promise from President Joseph Biden,” said Lozano.

The COVID-19 pandemic has decimated industries that rely on immigrant labor. Nearly seventy percent of workers deemed essential in the past year are undocumented and work in industries that face harsh and deadly conditions.

Lozano said workers in essential industries such as dairy, manufacturing, farming, and processing need direct and immediate routes to the benefits of citizenships.

Lozano ended his testimony with a robust cry of “legalize us!”

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This story was initially published in *The NEWcomer*, an independent journalism project covering local politics, community issues, art, and culture in Northeast Wisconsin. More information about *The NEWcomer* can be found here

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