

# CONTACTO

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## HOUSTON HISPANIC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY THE HOUSTON HISPANIC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH RUMBO

# The Sons and Daughters of the Undocumented Can Help Keep Their Parents from Being Deported: A Call to Vote

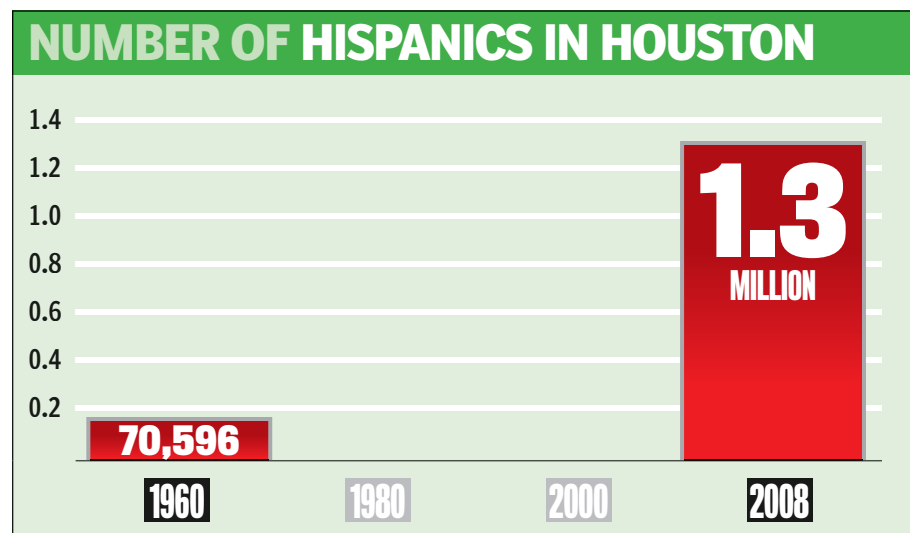
**George Y. Gonzalez, Chairman**

**Dr. Laura G. Murillo, President & CEO**

A Latina friend told me the other day, that in the doctor's office where she works, she is constantly called the "little wetback" by her co-workers. Another friend was chastised by a stranger because he spoke Spanish to the teller at the grocery store. We are increasingly hearing stories such as these from Latinos of all types. U.S. citizens, resident aliens, the undocumented – none is immune to the attacks brought on by an atmosphere of hatred against the undocumented. The FBI reports a 35 percent increase in the number of hate crimes against Latinos from 2003 to 2006. As a result, Latinos are finding it difficult to find jobs, even when they are legal U.S. residents and citizens. Others are being denied access to housing because local governments are passing ordinances banning renting housing to the undocumented.

The Latino community is under assault on local and national radio and television. The rhetoric has created a growing number of hate groups in America. The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that there are 888 hate groups operating in the U.S. – this is a 48 percent increase from 2000.

Under the guise of protecting the U.S. from terrorists, members of the media are actively leading a campaign of fear against Latinos. Brian James, a commentator on Arizona radio suggested that the problem of the undocumented could be resolved by, "randomly pick[ing] one night every week where we will kill whoever crosses the border." Others, while claiming that they have no problem with legal residents, protest bilingual education and ignore all of the statistical data indicating that immigrants from Latin America are learning English and U.S. customs. These immigrants are acculturating at the same pace as the other immigrant workers to hit our shores



from Italy, Greece and other non-English speaking communities in Europe. They protest the presence of Latinos because they are too Catholic, as though to pray to the same God that Protestants pray to were somehow a sin. They protest the presence of Latinos because they claim that the undocumented are taking jobs from U.S. citizens, ignoring all of the data indicating that these jobs are not being sought by U.S. citizens. The biggest fear should be from U.S. born laborers who can not be readily identified so easily from the undocumented.

Sadly, many Latinos are cowering behind closed doors, fearing hardball tactics of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Others are increasingly distrustful that someone will turn them in to the authorities. Many Latinos in Houston forget that they are members of the single largest ethnic group in the city, representing 42 percent of the population. The Latino population can change the discourse of this sad conversation. At the disposal of Latinos, and fundamental to change, is the power to vote. Even the undocumented, those most harshly treated by the current state of affairs, can help in this endeavor.

Many undocumented residents of our community have lived in the U.S. long enough to have children that are U.S. citizens who are old enough to vote. In the last presidential election, 18 percent of Latinos who were eligible to vote were between the ages of 18 and 24. Many of these 18 to 24 year olds are the sons and daughters of the undocumented. These young people are in a position to help their mothers and fathers simply by casting a vote in the next election. If every U.S. citizen son and daughter of a non-citizen voted, we could see an end to the negative

discourse of deporting the 10 to 16 million undocumented Latinos living in the U.S. Latinos would send a strong message that the deportation of family members will not be tolerated.

Deportation is not the solution... Deportation is inhumane and is devastating, especially for children. The consequences of deportation far outweigh the so-called benefits claimed by those seeking to nationalize this as 'the solution.'

No child should have to fear going to school because their parent or parents won't be home. We cannot condone this.

We must never forget that in the past, our government has deported Latinos en-masse out of this country before. In the 1930s, the U.S. government forcefully removed thousands of U.S. citizens who happened to be Latinos, sending them to Mexico. Many among them were U.S. citizens, removed from their country only because they were Latinos.

It is the citizen sons and daughters of the undocumented that, perhaps more than anyone else, can help keep their mothers and fathers from living in fear of being deported. They must remember history and how it can sometimes repeat itself. As Cardinal Dinardo recently indicated at a forum on immigration, in the United States in the 21st century people should not live in fear. If you live in Harris County, register to vote by calling 713-368-VOTE (8683).



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