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Thousands of Essential Undocumented Workers Demanded Dignity And Safe Working Conditions, In Nationwide Wave of Car Caravans

On May 1st, immigrant workers and families rallied in states across the country on May Day calling for dignity, respect, and permanent protection for immigrant workers. Protests follow news that unsafe working conditions in meatpacking plants are causing spikes in infection rates.

Nationwide- Immigrant workers across the country rallied in a wave of coordinated car caravans, in response to rampant workplace exploitation undocumented immigrants are facing during the COVID-19 crisis, and the failure of the government to provide basic relief to immigrant families. In Grand Rapids and Ann Arbor simultaneous protests attracted hundreds of cars, while protesters blocked streets. In New Bedford, Massachusetts immigrant workers facing hazardous conditions at fish processing plants rallied in cars, blocking traffic by the docks.

“During this pandemic, undocumented workers and our families have had to choose between risking our health, working in unsafe conditions without necessary protections or a fair wages, or losing the very income we rely on to feed our families,” said Norma Morales, a spokesperson for the Cosecha Movement in Lakewood, New Jersey. “The choice before us is to risk dying of hunger or dying of the virus.”

Many undocumented workers across the country are currently sustaining critical industries—often without access to protective equipment, paid sick time, or health insurance. These essential workers will receive $0 of federal aid from the new $2 million relief package. Millions of immigrants in the restaurant, retail, hospitality, and manufacturing industries are also facing mass layoffs with no access to unemployment benefits or other ways to support their families.

“Now is not the time for us to bow our heads in shame. For so many decades, we have been told that we don’t belong here and that we should not be here, while at the same time this country depends on our labor day in and day out in order to sustain it,” said Brenda Valladares, a spokesperson for Cosecha. “Enough is enough! As long as this country depends on our labor,
it should also respect and protect us. That means access to medical care, safe and dignified working conditions, basic welfare protections, and protection from deportation.

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