

Ally aims to help man stay in U.S.

By Robert Behre
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Gabino Sanchez was brought to the United States as a teenager and has lived here for 13 years, doing construction and landscaping work, providing for a family with two children and putting down roots in Jasper County.

And then he was stopped for a traffic violation.

This morning, Sanchez meets with an Immigration and Customs Enforcement official in downtown Charleston to learn if he can remain here or if he will face deportation.

His case has rallied local and national Hispanic advocates who will hold a vigil at 8 a.m. in Washington Square Park, just a few blocks away from where the hearing will be held at ICE's downtown office.

Gutierrez learned about Sanchez during a visit to Charleston this month. He said the case is an example of someone who should get a break under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's deportation priorities.

"I am returning to South Carolina to personally see that the authorities extend to him the consideration that all individuals in similar circumstances should receive as a matter of course," Gutierrez said in a statement.

Gutierrez chairs the Immigration Task Force of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

Emma Lozano, pastor of Lincoln United Methodist Church in Chicago and president of Familias Latinas Unidas/Sin Fronteras, came to Charleston this week to help with logistics.

"We believe that (deportation case) should be thrown out, completely closed and canceled. He totally fits criteria for discretion that we won in June from Barack Obama's administration," she said.

"If we don't push it, then they will continue business as usual and continue deporting people," Lozano said.

While the immediate issue is how Immigration and Customs Enforcement is handling deportations, the Hispanic community also is concerned about several states' new immigration laws.

Part of South Carolina's new law -- set to take effect Jan. 1 -- would require officers making a traffic stop to alert federal immigration officials if they suspect someone is in the country illegally. Opponents say it would encourage racial profiling.

"By accompanying Mr. Sanchez, I hope to show South Carolinians how to prepare for the January implementation of the state's draconian immigration law and to demonstrate to the community that there are federal policies in place to protect those with strong ties to the U.S. from deportation when states overstep their authority in immigration enforcement," Gutierrez said.

It's unclear if South Carolina's law will take effect in January: The Justice Department has filed a legal challenge, much as it did to a similar law in Arizona.

South Carolina Republicans, from the governor on down, have stood by the state's new immigration law, written by state Sen. Larry Grooms, R-Bonneau. While campaigning Monday in Charleston, GOP presidential contender and former House speaker Newt Gingrich made a point of praising Grooms' work and blasting the Justice Department's legal challenge to it.

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