

Immigration road show hits Cleveland, pushing for reform

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CLEVELAND, Ohio - Since Greater Cleveland has one of the lowest immigration rates of any metro area, Northeast Ohio seemed an unlikely stop on the Immigration Road Show.

But the tour's organizers said Cleveland was a perfect stop.

The purpose of Monday's rally was to shore up support among members of the Service Employees International Union to lobby the U.S. House of Representatives to pass immigration reform. Eliseo Medina, the keynote speaker at the event held at the SEIU District 1199 office on East 30th Street, said the union was uniquely positioned to fight for immigration reform. He is international secretary-treasurer for the union, which represents many lower-wage workers, including janitors and nursing assistants.

"A lot of our members are undocumented, so this directly affects us," he said after the event. "Many of our members desperately need immigration reform."

The U.S. Senate recently passed an immigration reform bill that offers a 13-year path to citizenship to the estimated 11 million "unauthorized residents" living in the country. A plan requiring businesses to check on the legal status of hires would be phased in over four years.

Immigration reform is now before the U.S. House. Speaker John Boehner, a Republican from suburban Cincinnati, did not allow a vote on immigration reform before Congress went on recess for August.

Medina said SEIU and other supporters of immigration reform believe it is important to appeal to residents in Boehner's home state.

"We have to make sure Ohioans get ahold of him and say: 'Allow the vote; and let the chips fall where they may.'"

Appeals were also made in Boehner's district. For example, unions, and other supporters of immigration reform, rallied and marched to Boehner's Springfield office July 27.

Medina said the Immigration Road Show would include 360 events during August. Some, like the Cleveland stop - which about 200 people attended -- focused the base of supporters. Other events would focus on making sure members of Congress support immigration reform.

"If they have town halls or go on a visit somewhere, then we will have somebody there to talk to them about this issue," Medina said.

He said when Congress returns to Washington in September, the lobbying efforts will shift to Capitol Hill.

"We have 11 million people who have no rights," Medina said. "They are being exploited, and being used to lower standards for all workers.

"This isn't an issue that just matters to immigrants," he said. "This is an issue that should matter to everybody."

Lynn Radcliffe, a SEIU delegate representing secretaries and other support staff in the Cleveland Municipal School District, said Northeast Ohio is still influenced by immigration, even if the numbers are low. For example, she said at least three Cleveland schools have high numbers of immigrant or first-generation students.

"I think as CMSD employees, we have an opportunity to get the word out about immigration reform because of the students we serve," she said.

http://www.cleveland.com/business/index.ssf/2013/08/immigration_road_show_hits_cle.html