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'UndocuBus' puts focus on U.S. immigration policy

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Pro-Immigration Rally: Pro-Immigration Rally

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A group of young, self-identified undocumented immigrants held a two-hour rally Thursday in South Nashville as part of a cross-country caravan ride to call attention to U.S. immigration policy.

"This is about showing how people should have hope," said Arely Bravo, 19, who graduated from John Overton High School in May as an undocumented immigrant. "I consider myself an American. I've been here my whole life."

Bravo, who was 6 when she was one of about 150 people at Reyna Salon in support of

The caravan of 45 people,

"Undocumented Nationalities Day" along the way. Arizona, among other states, has strict immigrant policies along the way.

The group's members said they have long advocated for the DREAM Act, a policy that would allow the children of undocumented immigrants to become citizens. The group also supports the President's executive order on immigration, an alternative measure allowing certain youths



Maria Cruz Ramirez dances with others from the UndocuBus during a rally Thursday outside La Reyna Salon off Nolensville Pike in South Nashville. / Larry

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to apply for temporary legal status.

"It's not the DREAM Act, but it's a step in the right direction," said Bravo, who plans to apply for temporary status under the measure this weekend. "It means being more safe in the community and not having to worry about deportation all the time. It means I'll be able to provide more for my family and help them."

Between musical performances, dozens of undocumented immigrants, most of them from Nashville, took a turn at the microphone to address the crowd. Their messages, all delivered in Spanish, were similar. They talked about their daily struggles, the fear they have of being separated from loved ones or being taken advantage of by employers.

"There is a lot of fear here," said Vilma Cueva, an event organizer with the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition. "This event is about celebrating and welcoming the bus to Nashville. We hope that it will send a strong message to the community. If the people on the bus can stand up and be vocal, then we can participate without fear, too."

A step for 'justice'

Cueva said it took organizers about two weeks to put together the rally in South Nashville. In all, about six organizations and charities were involved in the organization, including the [First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville](#).

Pastor Gail Seavey said about 100 members of her congregation at First Unitarian Universalist had been involved with UndocuBus in some way.

Her church provided housing for the group of 45 immigrants traveling on the bus. That group is slated to leave for Alabama early today.

"I got involved because I have seen local harassment here in South Nashville," she said. "I've seen many 'driving while brown' arrests, and I'm tired of seeing my neighbors harassed and feeling like I can do nothing about it. Any time a group is targeted and their human rights are taken away is a time when we all have to pay attention because if it happens to one, another will be next."

Earlier on Thursday, UndocuBus immigrants held a 30-minute rally downtown near the public library.

Luis Escoto, 19, a Glenciff High School graduate who said he was brought to the U.S. illegally by his parents, spoke during that event, saying that he, too, would be taking advantage of deferred action, but he remained concerned that friends and family have no way to remain legally in the country they came to 16 years ago from Mexico.



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"It makes me sad my parents are still at risk for being deported," Escoto said. "I say we need to do more; we all need to do something for justice."

Contact Nicole Young at 615-259-8091 or nyoung@tennessean.com.

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EVENT CALENDAR

- The BoDeans**
Friday, Aug 17, 7:00 pm
Riverfront Park, Nashville
- Steve Miller Band**
Saturday, Aug 18, 7:30 pm
Woods Amphitheatre at Fontanel, Nashville
- Nashville Sunday Jazz Band**
Sunday, Aug 19, 7:00 pm
Chappy's on Church, Nashville

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