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Rallying for Immigration Reform – and Gay & Lesbian Couples' Inclusion



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April 11, 2013

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - As Washington, D.C., and state capitols around the country were flooded with immigration reform advocates Wednesday, some made sure their lobbying, marching and rallying addressed the possibility that gay and lesbian couples will be left out of reform legislation expected to emerge in Congress shortly.

Monica Hernandez, Southeast Immigrant Rights Network, was knocking on senators' doors at the Dirksen Office Building. She was concerned about published reports that the bill will not include provisions allowing same-sex couples to apply for green cards for non-citizen partners.

"That is a key way that a lot of people have been able to regularize their status," she said, "and it's not an option for LGBT families."

The White House has urged Congress to include same-sex couples in immigration legislation, but Republicans working on reform are opposed.

Demonstrators also took the Obama administration to task for the continuing high numbers of deportations. Hernandez said she appreciated the administration's efforts to unite LGBT families through its marriage-equality stance, but added that the President falls short.

"We also need him to address the other side of the coin," she said, "which is the massive deportation and detentions of our families and our communities. In fact, this administration has deported more people than any other president."

Immigration laws currently do not treat gay and lesbian couples as legitimate family on green-card petitions because DOMA, the federal Defense of Marriage Act, does not recognize same-sex marriages, Hernandez explained.

"We are calling for the immigration reform to provide the opportunity for all families, including LGBT families, to be able to regularize their status," she said.

Some think the best chance for what are known as "bi-national" gay and lesbian families rests with the Supreme Court, which is currently considering the constitutionality of DOMA.

Mark Scheerer, Public News Service - TN

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