

NEW ORLEANS WORKERS' CENTER *for* RACIAL JUSTICE

Building worker power, advancing racial justice, and organizing to build a social movement in New Orleans

September 2, 2020

Acting Secretary Chad Wolf
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528
VIA email: DHSSecretary@hq.dhs.gov

Re: Letter Urging DHS To Suspend Immigration Enforcement During Hurricane Laura Recovery

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

We write to ask that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) enact and widely publicize policies to protect public safety as Louisiana and Texas begin recovering and rebuilding after Hurricane Laura. Specifically, we request that DHS immediately issue a public statement that it will not conduct immigration enforcement activities in all areas that have declared a state of emergency, and in areas where residents are traveling as part of the region's evacuation, sheltering and rebuilding response. The affected area includes at least the entire Gulf Coast region under the responsibility of the Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and New Orleans Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Field Offices, covering Texas, Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. DHS should act quickly to ensure the agency prioritizes rescue and relief efforts over immigration enforcement.

On Friday, Aug. 21, Governor John Bel Edwards declared a state of emergency for the State of Louisiana and on Saturday, Aug. 22, he requested federal emergency declaration ahead of the storms. President Trump approved this request for a Major Disaster Declaration Aug. 28, which applies to Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson Davis, Acadia, Vermilion, Catahoula, Grant, LaSalle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Sabine, Vernon, Winn, Bienville, Claiborne, Red River, Caldwell, Jackson, Lincoln, Ouachita and Union parishes. Similarly in Texas, on Aug. 23, Governor Greg Abbott issued a state disaster declaration and received approval from President Trump on Aug. 24. The declaration covers Aransas, Bexar, Brazoria, Calhoun, Cameron, Chambers, Galveston, Hardin, Harris, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson, Kenedy, Kleberg, Liberty, Matagorda, Newton, Nueces, Orange, Refugio, San Patricio, Victoria, and Willacy counties.

Emergency protection from hurricanes and natural disasters is a fundamental human right; evacuation and displacement should never lead to deportation. Yet in the absence of assurances from DHS, immigrant residents and their families fear risking deportation when they engage with the state's evacuation, shelter, and emergency aid efforts. Clear, specific assurances from DHS that immigration enforcement is unequivocally suspended is critical to the ongoing safety of all Gulf Coast residents during this humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, a moratorium on immigration enforcement activities is consistent with DHS's stated priorities in any emergency: life-saving and life-sustaining activities, preventing the loss of property to the extent possible, and assisting with a speedy recovery of the affected region.

There is precedent for the agency enacting immigration enforcement moratoriums post disaster, including after Hurricanes Florence and Michael. We urge DHS to issue a clear directive suspending immigration enforcement in the Gulf Coast region affected by Hurricane Laura, specifically the areas covered by the New Orleans, Houston, San Antonio and Dallas Field Offices. Thank you for your immediate attention to this important issue.

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Please contact Nikki Thanos, New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice's Legal and Policy Director, at nthanos@nowcrj.org or 504-616-1888 as soon as possible to discuss this urgent issue.

Signed,

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