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March 22, 2017

Dear Mr. Cortes, Orange County Immigrant Youth United, and Allies:

As Chief of Staff at SEIU Local 721, I write to reassure you that our Union remains firmly committed to fighting for justice and fairness for all – including the undocumented community. As you know, deportations were already a serious threat for numerous families living in Santa Ana and beyond, prior to the advent of the Trump Administration. But given the President's insistence on scapegoating undocumented workers for our nation's challenges, anxiety throughout the undocumented community – and especially among LGBTQ individuals – has reached palpable levels.

SEIU Local 721 members stand firmly on the right side of history and will not remain silent while Washington, D.C.'s rapacious, destructive new approach to immigration enforcement rips apart the American fabric. We recognize that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity, that the history of the LGBTQ community demonstrates they are especially vulnerable to discrimination, that all hard-working people deserve to live free from exploitation, persecution, and fear – and that undocumented immigrants are among America's most industrious and valuable workers.

The members of SEIU Local 721 also take pride in their hard work on behalf of the public. As their labor representative, it is our responsibility to advocate for their perspectives and interests. But especially given that public service is our mission, it is also our duty to ensure that the goals of our Union work in accordance with the greater public good. The Trump Administration's destructive approach to federal immigration enforcement clearly does not meet this standard. We cannot simultaneously provide high-quality services to the public in an atmosphere of mutual respect while helping to facilitate a general climate of fear. The members of the Santa Ana City Council understood this fact when they recently, and unanimously, voted to declare the municipality a "sanctuary city" – a courageous move that the over 90,000 members of SEIU Local 721 overwhelmingly support.

SEIU local 721 takes pride in working with and for our immigrant communities, in fact just two weeks ago over 400 SEIU Local 721 members joined community activists and concerned families in the City of Oxnard to demand that local authorities make Oxnard a "safe city" in the face of federal plans to step up enforcement of immigration laws.

We are proud of our vast efforts in supporting, defending, and advocating on behalf of undocumented immigrants, and consider the unanimous decision by the Santa Ana City Council to become a Sanctuary City a huge victory for the immigrant community. As a labor union, however, we also have a legal duty to meet with the City of Santa Ana on any impact that may affect our members' wages and working conditions as the City honorably prepares to become a sanctuary for undocumented immigrants. Our union is required to negotiate with the City on behalf of affected members on any changes in working conditions, including changes caused by the City's new status.

<http://www.seiu721.org>

1545 Wilshire Blvd., Ste 100 • Los Angeles CA 90017-9664 • Tel (213) 368-8660 • Fax (213) 380-8040
6177 River Crest Dr., Ste B • Riverside CA 92507 • Tel (951) 571-7700 • Fax (951) 653-6310
340 S. Farrell Dr., Ste A104 • Palm Springs CA 92262 • Tel (760) 322-7191 • Fax (760) 322-7161
2472 Eastman Ave., Ste 30 • Ventura CA 93003-5774 • Tel (805) 650-4420 • Fax (805) 650-1028

222 W Carmen Lane Ste 201 • Santa Maria CA 93458 • Tel (805) 623-5256 • Fax (805) 623-5257
1651 E 4th St., Ste 250 • Santa Ana CA 92701 • Tel (714) 541-1086 • Fax (714) 541-1084
42231 6th St. W., Ste 201 • Lancaster CA 93534 • Tel (661) 802-0977 • Fax (661) 974-7914

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The letter in dispute sent by the chapter president of Santa Ana was meant to be a simple request to meet the City on such changes, and nothing more. Unfortunately the letter contained statements contradictory to the values of our organization, and we wholeheartedly regret this mistake and have taken steps to rectify the situation. SEIU Local 721 takes this opportunity to clarify and reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the immigrant and undocumented community.

We want to assure our community partners that SEIU Local 721 is unequivocally opposed to the continuance of any ICE detention center in the City of Santa Ana.

I remain confident that SEIU Local 721 can work in coordination with you and other immigration allies moving forward to achieve a shared vision for Santa Ana – a future defined not by distrust and divisiveness, but by harmony and understanding. Such an outcome, however, requires regular and direct communication and a good faith effort. The Trump era calls on us all to work together and protect each other in the face of hate. SEIU 721 continues to stand with you and our many other community partners in our shared struggle.

Accordingly, I extend an offer to you – and all local immigration activists – to begin this endeavor with me and the members of our Santa Ana chapter.

Sincerely and With High Hopes for Our Future,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gilda Valdez". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gilda Valdez
Chief of Staff
SEIU Local 721