

APRIL-MAY 2021

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEIU 721



A MESSAGE FROM SEIU 721  
PRESIDENT LINDA DENT

**T**here's a reckoning going on in America about race. From the historic guilty verdict in the trial of Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd to the outcry against Georgia Republicans' efforts to pass laws discouraging Black Georgia residents from voting — there's a renewed discussion about how structural racism hurts people of color.

What we should be talking about is how structural racism hurts all working people — including White workers — and how the ultra-rich and corporate interests benefit from perpetuating it.

Racism is a powerful tool of control — a divide and conquer strategy that allows a small, privileged class to win elections, grab enormous wealth and control a justice system designed more to protect their private property than the safety of the general public.

President Lyndon Johnson described it exactly the same way: "If you can convince the lowest White man he's better than the best Black man, he won't notice you're picking his pocket."

Study after study has shown that workers — White, Black or Brown — earn more and live better when they come together in unions. That's why it's no surprise that Vance Muse, the Texas lobbyist paid by railroads and corporations to pass anti-Union "Right to Work" laws across the South in the 1920s, couched his campaigns in racist terms. He used racist appeals to manipulate White workers into voting for laws that depressed their own pay and crippled their power.

Fast forward to today. Corporate America produces feel-good ads on diversity but runs for cover when it comes to dismantling racism.

Big business has been overwhelmingly silent on the guilty verdict in the Chauvin case, with the exception of a handful of mostly California firms.

After loudly praising Black Lives Matter, Amazon spent millions in Alabama intimidating its mostly Black workforce from voting for a Union — including pressuring the U.S. Postal Service to install a mailbox under company security cameras that they labeled as an official polling place for the Union election.

Coca-Cola, Delta and other firms that loudly celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday kept silent when the Georgia legislature adopted voter suppression laws targeting Blacks.

Remember that, while he became famous for historic speeches promoting racial equality, Dr. King was assassinated while campaigning for Union rights for both Black and White sanitation workers.

Our Union believes in economic justice for all workers — regardless of race, color, creed, national origin, sexual orientation or immigration status. Dismantling structural racism benefits all of us.

*Linda Dent*







### WATTS HEALTH CENTER WORKERS WIN BIG FOR PATIENT SAFETY AND AVOID STRIKE

Watts Health Center employees, who were gearing up for an historic Unfair Labor Practice strike to protect public health and patient safety during the COVID-19 pandemic, reached a tentative agreement on August 14.

After months of on-the-ground organizing with patients, community leaders and elected officials, Watts Health Center workers beat back severe proposed rate increases to family healthcare coverage and secured investment in the frontline health services they provide.

For more than 50 years, Watts Health Center has provided life-saving care to the LA region's most vulnerable low-income residents. When the COVID-19 pandemic swept through South Los Angeles, Watts workers were among the first on the frontlines, providing testing and care to residents.

Unfortunately, Watts Health Center management responded to their employees' heroism with a proposal to cut their sick time by half and raise the cost of their family healthcare coverage

— even as multiple Watts Healthcare facilities were reporting COVID-19 outbreaks.

Management's campaign of intimidation, surveillance and other Union-busting tactics was the last straw, prompting Watts workers to authorize an Unfair Labor Practice Strike by an unprecedented unanimous vote.

**Watts Healthcare workers – mostly working-class Black and Brown women – reflect the community they serve. Their 11th-hour victory is a triumph for them and their patients.**

**Linda Dent  
President, SEIU 721**



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT APRIL-MAY 2021



SEIU 721 member Jason Gibson, a Biomedical Waste Technician at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, is one of the stars of *The Longest Shift*, a new photo exhibit honoring LA's essential workers.

### “THE LONGEST SHIFT” SALUTES SEIU 721 MEMBERS AND OTHER FRONTLINE WORKERS

SEIU 721 members and other essential workers on the frontlines of the pandemic are the stars of a new photo exhibit by acclaimed photographer Sam Comen.

Comen's striking portraits of celebrities and pop stars have graced the pages of *Entertainment Weekly*, *Glamour*, *Esquire* and *Rolling Stone*, while his powerful documentary photo essays of immigrants and justice activists have won a slew of awards and worldwide critical acclaim.

For the anniversary of California's COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, Comen visited dozens of essential workers in Los Angeles to capture their portraits and document their experiences for *The Longest Shift*.

Comen reached out to SEIU 721 and numerous other unions and community organizations, including UFCW, Teamsters, Firefighters, the Mobile Workers Alliance, United Teachers Los Angeles, Fight for \$15, and others to capture the experience of a huge range of workers.

Some are first responders. Many are Black and Latino, performing jobs that allow many LA professionals to work from home. Their stories drive home stark issues of social injustice, as many have done high-risk work with little public recognition or support.

One example is SEIU 721 member Jason Gibson, a Biomedical Waste Technician at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center.

“I’ve seen a lot, I mean, this place was crazy,” Gibson said about the hospital. “I just got my first vaccination. My mother didn’t want me to take it, but I have to protect myself, because my stepfather died of cancer last year. He collapsed and died in my arms. And then my nephew just lost his father. He has no parents, so death has been in our family left and right.”

“Essential workers don’t have the option to be ‘safer at home,’” said Comen. “They have risked their lives every day the last year taking on the longest shift.”

Hear from more essential workers at [TheLongestShift.com](https://TheLongestShift.com).



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT APRIL-MAY 2021



From worksite to worksite throughout the City, we're standing with our Heavy-Duty Equipment Mechanics and Senior Mechanics who keep City services moving along!

In case you missed it, we've filed a group grievance against the City of LA to get our Heavy-Duty Equipment and Senior Mechanics the pay equity they deserve.

That's why we've stickered up and will continue to take solidarity actions until our Mechanics get the correct pay for all the hard work they do for this City.

**FAIR PAY FOR LA CITY MECHANICS NOW!  
SEIU 721 FILES GROUP GRIEVANCE ON PAY EQUITY**

**I SUPPORT MY  
MECHANICS!**



**WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK! SEIU 721 SCORES  
REPRESENTATIONAL WINS FOR WORKERS**

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One of the best demonstrations of the value of union membership is our union's ability to help workers enforce contracts and resolve workplace problems with discipline, favoritism, bullying and other issues. Here are a couple of recent examples where Union representation

helped SEIU 721 members:

From 2007 to 2014, a Child Social Worker in Adoptions in the Glendora office of the LA County Department of Children and Family Services received a bi-lingual bonus, as mandated by our Union Contract. After she returned from a maternity leave, she reapplied for the bonus, but never received it. SEIU 721 helped her recover all of her retroactive pay.

A Stationary Mechanic at L.A. County Sanitation Districts was suspended for allegedly arguing with a co-worker and refusing to train him on a piece of equipment. While serving the suspension, the worker received a notice that the Sanitation Districts intended to terminate him for the same charge. A member leader at the Sanitation District and the SEIU Advocacy Department successfully argued that the District could not charge the employee twice for the same offense. The District withdrew the termination and only required that he attend a five-session training program.



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### HEMET VICTORY AND NEW SIGN-UPS SHOW INLAND REGION IS BUILDING UNION STRENGTH

### LA COUNTY BU 729 MEMBERS: TELL YOUR STORY AND HELP US PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY IN PROMOTIONS

SEIU 721 members in the Inland Region are building our Union power by asserting their rights and signing up new members. Currently, the Inland Empire region is leading our Union in new member signups, and more members means more muscle. That muscle is paying off across the region, with victories big and small for thousands of SEIU 721 represented workers.

City of Hemet workers recently ratified a new contract and will receive backpay going back to 2019 on their first May paycheck. As we used our Union voice to work with management to mitigate the worst effects of the COVID-19 crisis, Riverside County Courts members agreed to a furlough agreement in October of 2020. Now, due to vigilant monitoring of revenue, expenditures and, specifically, any savings as a result of the furloughs, we're pleased to report that the scheduled May and June furlough days have been rescinded!



Are you a member of BU 729 in the LA County Department of Health Services? Have you experienced favoritism or other problems in promotions? Our union wants to hear your story.

Members of BU 729 in the LA County Department of Health Services recently launched a petition to call for greater transparency in the promotions process for eligibility workers and other employees in the department.

Some members have alleged a "Catch-22" in career advancement. For example, some describe a situation where a worker can't win a promotion unless she can demonstrate she's taken a lead role in a special project, but these special projects are frequently assigned based on favoritism.

If you've encountered this problem, sign the petition and be on the lookout for a link to a questionnaire where you can confidentially report your personal experiences.

You can access the petition on the homepage of our website at [www.seiu721.org](http://www.seiu721.org).





## PRESIDENT'S REPORT APRIL-MAY 2021



### SEIU 721 VENTURA HOSPITAL FOOD SERVICE WORKERS STAND UP FOR FAIR SCHEDULING

### TRI-COUNTIES REGION IS ON A ROLL, TRAINING DOZENS OF NEW UNION STEWARDS



SEIU 721 members Agustin Garcia and Jesse Ojeda flexed their Union power to overcome favoritism in scheduling at the Ventura County Medical Center.

Garcia, a Cook, and Ojeda, a Food Services Shift Supervisor, along with other members at the hospital's Dietary Department, filed a grievance in October of 2020, claiming that managers were changing their schedules at the last minute — not in response to emergencies but out of sheer favoritism.

Garcia and Ojeda knew they had the protection of a strong SEIU 721 County of Ventura contract, which requires 21-day advance notice of non-emergency schedule changes. After line managers refused to respond, the dispute went all the way to VCMC CEO Dr. Frankhauser, who granted the grievance.



Since the start of the year, the Tri-Counties region has recruited and begun training dozens of new stewards. This means better representation for our workers and a safer, more prosperous workplace.

SEIU 721 trainers have been hard at work providing an average of three trainings per week. Tri-Counties region has members at nearly every training — from New Steward Orientation to workshops on Grievance Handling, FMLA and Weingarten Rights.

Tri-Counties members are stepping up from across the region.

Steward Mary Birch, a Librarian in the Ventura County Library, and Matthew Sainz, W.R. Plant Operator I, from Las Virgenes Municipal Water District, are two new stewards ready to help their Union brothers and sisters build better, more supportive workplaces.

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**“I’m grateful that I was able to make a difference, and I know I’m not the only one. Tens of thousands of LA County employees have gone above and beyond for the past year.”**

**Theresa Lollis  
COVID-19 Contact Tracer  
LA County**

### FRONTLINE WORKERS REMIND LA SUPERVISORS OF THE HARROWING TOLL OF THE PANDEMIC

In April, 20 LA County SEIU 721 members delivered powerful testimony to the Board of Supervisors detailing our struggles and triumphs during the COVID-19 pandemic and reiterating our call for Heroes Pay for All.

For more than a year now, the members of SEIU 721 have faced daunting challenges and serious dangers. Healthcare workers have witnessed unimaginable suffering and have fought to save lives by putting their own lives and their families’ lives at risk. Disaster services workers have taken on entirely new duties in difficult circumstances to protect and care for our communities’ most vulnerable. Office workers have struggled to perform their regular duties remotely while multi-tasking as parent, teacher, food service worker, and counselor.

Workers like Theresa Lollis, an intermediate clerk typist at the LA County Internal Services Department office in Downey, who volunteered to become a COVID-19 Contact Tracer.

“As COVID-19 swept the county, I wanted to help,” Lollis said.

“I realized that, as a county employee, I could be a disaster services worker.”

Lollis was put into training and spent dozens of hours reviewing videos, participating in training sessions and learning outreach scripts.

“It was a tremendous amount of work, especially during the surge, but it felt good to deliver thousands of masks and educate people in our community,” Lollis said. “I’ve lost some people — we need to work to keep people safe.”

SEIU 721 members have made tremendous personal sacrifices. As essential workers, we have risen to the occasion, and held Los Angeles County together throughout this awful pandemic.

We have done our part. April 20, we called on the LA County Board of Supervisors to do theirs. We demand that LA County recognize, appreciate, and compensate workers for what we do each day, and that means Heroes Pay for every LA County member — and we won’t stop fighting until we get it.



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT APRIL-MAY 2021

**“We need to teach stewards, it’s not just about fighting, we need to be smart and strategic.”**

**Adolfo Granados  
Member, SEIU 721  
Executive Board**



### SEIU 721 Coaches Help Stewards Ignite the Power of Our Union

An Eligibility Worker II for the LA County Department of Public Social Services for 22 years, SEIU 721 Executive Board member Adolfo Granados’ hard work, leadership and skill as a steward propelled him into leadership of our union. He now shares his experience with stewards across our union as part of a squad of expert coaches tasked with making sure SEIU 721 delivers the full power and benefits of union membership to every worker who joins SEIU 721.

“I’m a behind the scenes guy...I like solving problems,” says Granados. “But that means putting in the time talking to 721 stewards and members who need help — sometimes starting at 6 a.m. in the morning all the way until 10 p.m.”

Granados and the other steward coaches bring decades of invaluable experience helping workers deal with favoritism, workplace bullying, unsafe conditions and a host of other problems.

“I coach and teach that the old ways have changed — it’s not just about fighting, we need to be smart and strategic,” Granados says.

“With the workers, you need to show them that, for them to get what they want — better pay, help with a bad boss, whatever — you need to build collective power.”

Granados helps stewards and individual members come up with

strategies for dealing with a wide array of complaints and problems.

“A member who was written up for repeatedly showing up late wanted to move directly to a grievance,” said Granados. Rather than pursue a grievance that was a sure loser, he convinced the worker to opt for progressive discipline and explore alternative work schedules.”

“Set reasonable expectations for members, build unity and power, and develop a rapport with management,” Granados says. “Bad management loves fighting constantly with the union, it allows them to cover up their own incompetence, mistakes and bad behavior.” Granados instead advises stewards to find win-win solutions that make worksites work better. “Choose your battles. Then, if you need to go to the mat on something, you’re more likely to win.”

Granados is now focusing on how to train stewards on the threat of professional union busters, like the Freedom Foundation.

“You have these con-men running around our worksites, funded by billionaires, trying to convince workers to drop the best protection they have — their union membership — with a bunch of lies. It makes me furious,” Granados says. “I’m like a firefighter — I will go wherever there is a fire in this union and put it out.”



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### Week of Action Promotes Fast Recovery Act to Protect Fast-Food Workers

Following a week of action led by fast-food workers from San Diego to Sacramento and joined by SEIU 721 members, the California Assembly Judiciary Committee approved landmark legislation to protect the health and safety of workers in quick service restaurants.

AB 257, the Fast Food Accountability and Standards or “FAST” Recovery Act — authored by San Diego Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez — will address long-standing concerns over worker safety and prevent exploitation in the fast food restaurant industry by giving workers the power to help set industry-wide health and safety standards and hold corporations accountable for keeping workers safe.

At the committee hearing, Los Angeles McDonald’s worker Lizzet Aguilar, who was fired for speaking out about COVID-19 safety issues, testified about the need for legislation.

“Like other essential workers, my co-workers and I have risked our safety to serve our customers and the community. But, McDonald’s has done little to protect us,” Aguilar said.

“We cannot transform the broken fast-food industry store by store, strike by strike. We need sweeping change ... AB 257 is the first step to achieving that.”

The Assembly vote capped off a week of action, including:

- A rally outside a McDonald’s in Oakland’s Fruitvale District that cut workers’ hours after they requested time off to be vaccinated for COVID-19.
- Passage of resolutions in support of AB 257 by county supervisors in both San Francisco and Santa Clara Counties.
- A solidarity action at the Cesar Chavez National Monument at Nuestra Señora Reina de la Paz, featuring SEIU 721 Secretary Lillian Cabral, where fast-food workers joined with members of the United Farm Workers in support of AB 257. A critical part of the restaurant supply chain, California farm workers have fallen ill and died in alarming numbers since the onset of COVID-19.

**“Sacramento wake the hell up! Workers don’t want the crumbs on your table, we want an entree!”**

**Lillian Cabral  
Secretary  
SEIU 721**



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### NURSES OPTIMISTIC BUT VIGILANT AS LA COUNTY REPORTS NO COVID DEATHS



SEIU 721 Nurses and healthcare workers report that LA County is finally turning the corner on the pandemic, but remain vigilant on workplace safety issues. By the end of April, only ten patients were in LA DHS Intensive Care Units, and for two days straight at the beginning of May, LA County reported no COVID deaths. As vaccination rates rise, LA County Department of Mental Health, Department of Health Services and the Department of Public Health are beginning to bring tele-working employees back to County facilities. While infection rates are down, our Union will continue to demand comprehensive safety plans and sufficient PPE.

### SEIU 721'S GAEDE AND HUBBARD TOP LIST OF TEXTING CHAMPS FOR RESCUE PLAN

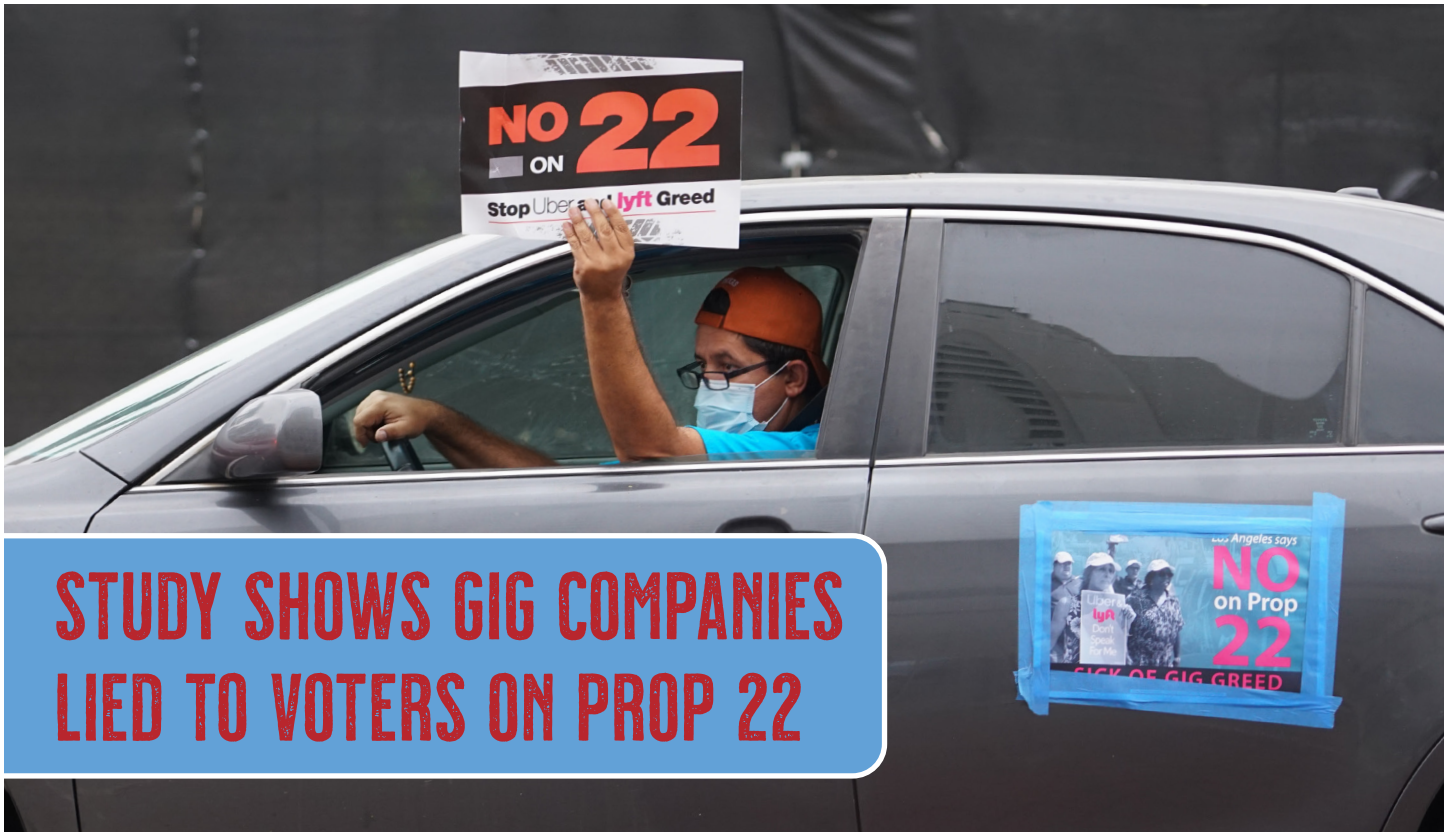
NAME	LOCAL	TOTAL SCORE	TOTAL RANK	LOCAL RANK	500K CLUB	100K CLUB
Bill Sanchez	105	2,542,879	1	1	★	★
Alimamy Barrie	1199 UHE	932,301	2	1	★	★
Timothy Rodgers	1199 UHE	889,702	3	2	★	★
Genevieve Gaede	721	656,085	4	1	★	★
Troy Hubbard	721	566,384	5	2	★	★
Alyssa Jones-Garner	1021	486,651	6	1	★	★
Yenny Hernandez	32BJ	318,609	7	1	★	★
Salvie Colina	1000	206,457	8	1	★	★
Ana Escalante	1	199,828	9	1	★	★
DYLAN Jordan	INTL	120,010	10	1	★	★

Congratulations to SEIU 721 members Genevieve Gaede and Troy Hubbard, who topped SEIU's Purple Text-a-thon leader board and helped pass President's Biden's \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, which is crucial to saving funding for vital state and local government services and the jobs of the public workers who provide them.

Over the last few months, SEIU members across the U.S. volunteered to text millions of voters across America in support of the Biden Administration's Rescue Plan and recruited thousands of them to contact their elected officials. As a result, families across America are getting the respect, protections and funds they need to survive.



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT APRIL-MAY 2021



### STUDY SHOWS GIG COMPANIES LIED TO VOTERS ON PROP 22

## WORKER SURVEY EXPOSES INDUSTRY'S BROKEN PROMISES ON HEALTHCARE

Rideshare and delivery drivers exposed the broken promises of Prop 22, using survey data collected from more than 500 California gig workers at a virtual press conference on April 29.

The new study is the first in-depth analysis of how gig companies' self-interested interpretation of Prop 22 aims to exclude drivers from the promised health stipend, a key benefit that was heavily publicized in Uber and Lyft's record-breaking \$220 million "Yes on 22" campaign.

The study, conducted by respected pollsters Tulchin Research, found rideshare drivers face widespread problems accessing promised stipends. A shocking 86% of surveyed drivers are likely ineligible for life-saving healthcare funding — mostly due to unilateral decisions by gig companies that violate the letter and the spirit of the law adopted by California voters last year. Rideshare and delivery platforms are throwing up technical and

administrative barriers not mandated by Prop 22 to drivers seeking to access promised stipends, leaving tens of thousands of their uninsured or working-poor employees without the promised benefits that Californians approved last November.

Drivers also report mass confusion regarding the healthcare benefit, with 66% reporting they had not been given enough information from their employers about how to even apply for the stipend, and 60% reporting they have not been given adequate information about which drivers are eligible.

The failures of the Prop 22 healthcare stipend are yet another example of the way the gig economy passes costs on to their workers and the public coffers while siphoning up private revenue. Drivers are calling on gig companies to honor the promises of the Prop 22 campaign and automatically disburse health insurance stipends to all drivers who meet the minimum hours requirements.

# CARE NOT CAGES! SEIU 721 TAPPED TO HELP PROTECT REFUGEE CHILDREN



"The child refugee reunification effort is tailor made for us. We're a union of immigrants and our members protect thousands of children everyday."

David Green, CSW, Vice President, SEIU 721



## SEIU 721 Chief of Staff Gilda Valdez and Children's Social Worker and SEIU 721 V.P. David Green Discuss How 721 Members are Leading the Groundbreaking LA County Effort to Reunite Refugee Children with Family

I sat down with SEIU 721 V.P. David Green — a veteran LA County Children's Social Worker — to discuss the County's exciting plan to take 2,500 child refugees from Latin America out of California Border Patrol detention facilities and move them into special supportive care at the Pomona Fairplex. Our Union is helping to recruit both active duty and retired SEIU 721 Children's Social Workers to help with family reunification efforts.

**Gilda:** David, what an exciting effort. SEIU 721 members have been horrified by the refugee crisis at the border. Over the last year-and-a-half, we've organized five humanitarian aid trips to provide supplies and care to refugee kids.

**David:** This opportunity is tailor-made for us. We're a Union of immigrants and we care for children — literally. We represent everyone from childcare workers to Children's Social Workers to healthcare workers in pediatric hospitals. Supervisor Hilda Solis and LA County DCFS Director Bobby Cagle brought our Union in to devise a plan to help reunite refugee kids with family members — 80 percent of these kids, who are fleeing instability in Guatemala and other Central American countries, have relatives in the U.S. — so we modeled it after the wildly successful Upfront Family Finding program.

**Gilda:** Yes! That's the program that uses retired SEIU 721 social workers as

volunteers to help place children in safe homes with relatives or good foster parents.

**David:** Exactly. We wanted an approach that would help refugee children without "Robbing Peter to Pay Paul." We have 150,000 kids a year referred to LA County DCFS, and we are finally getting caseload ratios under control. This way we can care for refugee children without putting the rest of the kids in the DCFS caseload at greater risk.

**Gilda:** Who else is involved?

**David:** The program is federally funded through HHS. LA County DHS is doing the upfront health screenings. Department of Mental Health is doing assessments and counseling. LA County Office of Education will coordinate education services. Our CSWs will be doing case management and reunification. Three meals a day, clean beds and no cages!

**Gilda:** David, thank you for taking the lead on this. Welcome and good luck to these children!

Gilda Valdez, Chief of Staff



Digital  
Union  
Voices

To organize during quarantine, we need Digital Union Voices. Text VOICES to 31996 today!