

Vermont Migrant Farmworker Solidarity Project

294 N. Winooski Ave. Burlington VT 05401 ♦ 802-658-6770 ♦ vtmfsp.org ♦ vtmfsp@gmail.com

Honorable Peter Shumlin, Governor
State of Vermont
109 State Street, Pavilion
Montpelier, VT 05609
RE: Bias-Free-Policing

October 14, 2011

Dear Governor Shumlin,

Vermont is poised for change that is occurring throughout the nation. Our racial and cultural diversity is growing. We can choose to celebrate, embrace, and facilitate the arrival of new neighbors, or we can ignore, misunderstand, and marginalize them. Vermont has a proud tradition of inclusion and social justice that we must vigilantly uphold, in our laws, in our institutions, in our neighborhoods, and in our everyday interactions.

It is only when laws are administered evenly that trust can be built and freedoms upheld for all people who reside within our borders. We cannot truly walk the path of justice until the most voiceless and invisible among us can come into the light and speak freely, or until they can be passengers on a ride home from a meal shared with friends without fear of deportation.

Those workers that largely go unheard and unseen -- who pick our apples, milk our cows, and clean our hotels -- now have names and faces, not in small part due to the courage and strength of Danilo Lopez, a farmworker who took great risks just to tell his story in hope that it will help future generations of immigrants and farm laborers.

Along with his friend Antonio Meza, he now faces the very real risk of deportation in an incident that clearly would not have had the same outcome if their skin were a different color. We cannot support our farmers without supporting our farmworkers, and we cannot reasonably enforce immigration policies that operate in isolation of the reality of our agricultural needs and practices.

We have seen what the Vermont way looks like in the wake of Irene. Neighbor helping neighbor, communities coming together - the recognition that far more unites us in our common humanity than can ever divide us. Let it be so for our treatment of all who love and live in Vermont, who toil in her farms and produce her agricultural bounty, and who have come out of her shadows to claim their dignity and basic human rights.

It is with this spirit that we, as community leaders and people of color, thank you, Governor Shumlin, for your support of Danilo and Antonio, and for your commitment to the need for responsible, comprehensive federal immigration reform and to the fair and just treatment of all people.

In solidarity with the migrant farmworker leaders you are meeting with on October 14, **we respectfully ask that you help clarify the State's Bias Free Policing policies to protect people like Danilo and Antonio, and to help keep all communities safe by directing Vermont police not to act as immigration enforcement agents.**

We look forward to working with you on these issues, and to supporting you in your courageous leadership.

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Sincerely,

1. Rep. Kesha Ram, Burlington Resident
2. Mercedes Mack, Vermont Workers' Center
3. Sarah Martinez de Osaba, Founder, Vermont Multicultural Alliance for Democracy & Equality
4. Curtiss Reed, Jr., Executive Director, Vermont Partnership for Fairness & Diversity
5. Philomena Gicheru, President, Association of Africans Living in Vermont
6. Patrick Brown, Greater Burlington Multicultural Resource Center
7. Beverly Colston, Winooski Resident
8. Jeanine Bunzigiye, Congo Umoja
9. Billie Miles, Burlington Resident
10. Edmund A. Booth, Huntington Resident
11. Olga Coralí Cotrina Ling, Association of Africans Living in Vermont
12. Arshad Hasan, Burlington Resident
13. Francoise Kahindo, Congo Umoja
14. Traci Griffith, Williston Resident
15. Lindsay W. Reid, South Burlington Resident
16. Rashad Shabazz, PhD, Colchester Resident
17. John Austin, Burlington Resident
18. Dan Balón, Shelburne Resident
19. Deborah M. Pereira, Burlington Resident
20. Jeetan Khadka, Diversity Rocks
21. Sarika Tandon, Vermont Anti-Racism Action Team
22. Natalia Fajardo, Vermont Migrant Farmworker Solidarity Project
23. Ainaka Luna, Spanish Teacher
24. Sonia Laboy, Middlebury Resident
25. Autumn Martinez, UE Chief Steward, Local 255
26. Faried Munarsyah, Vermont Workers Center
27. Nathaly Agosto Filión, Burlington Resident
28. Monica Murrugarra Collins, Rochester Resident, VT Migrant Farmworker Solidarity Project
29. Dean Wang, University of Vermont Professor, Rubenstein School of the Environment
30. Peter Keny, South Sudanese Burlington Resident
31. Ali Hadji Jafari, Civil Rights Activist and Freelance Filmmaker
32. Pablo S. Bose, PhD, University of Vermont Professor, Department of Geography
33. Raymi De La Cruz, JUNTOS Student group