

Hispanic Affairs Project



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Local Leaders Build Legal Assistance Program to Help Keep Immigrant Families Together

Hispanic Affairs Project (HAP) Receives Recognition & Accreditation from the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) to Offer Legal Assistance to Low-Income Families, Asks Community to Help Fund Program

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Effective April 15, 2015, two employees of the regional non-profit, Hispanic Affairs Project, are accredited to provide immigration assistance with family-based petitions to low-income families and individuals living in Western Colorado.

The Hispanic Affairs Project (HAP) is a grassroots organization serving the immigrant community in six urban and rural counties in Western Colorado, including Mesa, Delta, Montrose, San Miguel, Ouray and Gunnison. HAP programs include: Immigration Legal Assistance (BIA Accredited), Migrant Outreach, Combating Human Trafficking, Welcoming Colorado Initiative, Leadership Development & Community Organizing, Supporting Pro-Immigrant Policies, and Community Resource Center.

The recent approval of HAP's request for recognition and accreditation from the Board of Immigration Appeals in the Department of Justice will enable immigrants who cannot afford legal fees to receive qualified representation with immigration applications. The unauthorized practice of law by people who purport to provide legal assistance but who jeopardize the future of many families is an ongoing problem in the area. Limited financial resources often prevent immigrant families from applying for the immigration benefits for which they may qualify. The HAP Board took steps to found the legal assistance program to address these issues, supporting family unity for many across the region.

HAP leader and past board member Joel Flores said, **“This program will help many families to save money and receive trustworthy help with their petitions. It will help keep many families together. People often wait to file petitions because they cannot afford the expensive legal and application fees, and things happen while they wait to save the money, and the families end up being separated. Through this program, the help is coming from HAP, an organization that is already known and trusted for serving the community.**

HAP is a 501c3 organization dedicated to developing Hispanic leadership and supporting community needs in Western Colorado

When a family gains legal status, it brings great happiness, because they know they can stay together.”

Hispanic Affairs Project employees, Ms. Marketa Zubkova of Crested Butte and Ms. Nicole Bernal Ruiz of Fruita, received legal training over the past two years in preparation for the request for partial accreditation to represent immigrants with family-based petitions; they will begin offering services in May. Ms. Zubkova, who holds a Master’s Degree from Prescott College and a Bachelor’s Degree from Western State College, in addition to degrees from her native Czech Republic, has been a HAP leader for nearly a decade; in 2013, she received the 8th Annual Immigrant Liberty Awards presented by the Colorado Chapter of the American Association of Immigration Lawyers for her extensive volunteer outreach with H2A range workers. Ms. Bernal Ruiz holds an MA and a BA from the University of Notre Dame, and has worked for HAP on immigrant advocacy and integration projects since 2009. The women will provide services in Montrose at the HAP office, located at 300 N. Cascade Ave. Ste. C-4, and at Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church in Grand Junction at 790 26.5 Road.

The BIA accreditation of HAP’s legal assistance program comes as the Firth Circuit Court of Appeals considers whether or not a preliminary injunction will hold, which has halted President Obama’s November 2014 announcement of Administrative Relief. The two major pieces of Administrative Relief, Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) and the expansion of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), would provide work authorization and deferred action for an estimated 4.5 million immigrants living in the U.S. Since Obama’s 2012 announcement of the original DACA program, hundreds of thousands of so-called ‘dreamers’ have been granted DACA, enabling many to work legally, attend a university, or pursue vocational education. Across the region, hundreds of youth have received assistance with DACA through HAP, with the support of local immigration attorneys, including The Law Office of Imelda Mulholland, LLC, and the San Luis Valley Immigrant Resource Center, and accredited agency based in Alamosa. Those whose DACA applications were approved have been able to work legally, obtain a social security number, and apply for a Colorado driver’s license. If DAPA is implemented, HAP will be able to assist hundreds with the application process, in addition to assisting with family-based immigration processes, including citizenship and adjustment of status, among others.

The Hispanic Affairs Project will begin representing clients in May. Community members are encouraged to support the new program by making a tax-deductible donation to the 501c3 organization. Online donation and more information is available at www.hapgj.org.
