

Voces de la Frontera: Wisconsin Republicans on the Joint Finance Committee undermine democracy while 1500 join May Day March in Milwaukee on May 1

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(WISCONSIN) – On Tuesday, the 16 member Republican-led Joint Finance Committee (JFC) [removed a total of 545 items from the Wisconsin State budget](#), including measures to restore access to drivers licenses for immigrants as well as in-state tuition equity for immigrant students.

Voces de la Frontera (Voces), Wisconsin's largest grassroots immigrant rights organization, members and allies have been escalating pressure on the JFC hearings over the past few months. **In response to the JFC committee's decision, Voces de la Frontera's Executive Director Christine Neumann-Ortiz, issued the following statement:**

“The Joint Finance Committee (JFC)’s decision to strip 545 provisions from the Wisconsin state budget, including restoring access to drivers licenses and in-state tuition for immigrants is shameful. In a blatant attempt to undermine democracy, Republicans on the JFC have made procedural votes to shut down debate and block new votes to reintroduce these items. The Republican led JFC has turned its back on democracy and majority support of common sense legislation that would make our roads and communities safer, and support youth in pursuing their educational dreams.

Voces de la Frontera will continue to move forward with engaging Latinxs and

multiracial youth statewide and in partnership with diverse statewide allies through the Wisconsin Coalition for Safe Roads, to introduce state legislation for driver licenses and tuition equity, and we are confident that we will eventually make a breakthrough.

Latinxs and multiracial youth were inspired to turn out for the state Supreme Court election to win a progressive majority that would dismantle undemocratic gerrymandering, and clear the path for state driver licenses, in state tuition, reproductive justice and public school funding. So we are motivated and empowered because we have the will of the majority at our sails.”

Despite Tuesday’s vote by Republicans on the JFC, the fact that an overwhelming majority of Wisconsinites support drivers licenses for all and broad immigration reforms, was evident during the Voces de la Frontera May Day 2023 activities.

On Monday, May 1, despite freezing rain and strong winds, approximately 1500 immigrant essential workers and their families, small business owners, students, and allies participated in the first of a two-day May Day marches and rallies in Wisconsin, organized by Voces and Voces youth members of Youth Empowered in the Struggle (Y.E.S.).

The events contributed to a national day of action for the immigrant rights movement, where dozens of actions took place on behalf of the [FIRM](#) (Fair Immigration Reform Movement) network, which called for escalated pressure on the Biden administration to deliver on promises to roll back anti-immigrant policies from past administrations and pass long-overdue protections for immigrants through executive action.

In Wisconsin, Monday’s event kicked off at 9:00 a.m. with a student-led picket for lunch reform outside the Milwaukee Public School office building, before students joined immigrant essential workers, families and allies at the original Voces de la Frontera Milwaukee office in the heart of Walker’s Point. There was a pre-rally with immigrant and refugee speakers and community and labor allies before a march to Zeidler Union Square downtown.

Despite the unforgiving weather, the rain and sleet did not dampen the energy and enthusiasm of marchers who walked nearly 2 miles to raise awareness for the following demands: (1) President Biden fulfill his campaign promise to abolish the discriminatory [287g program](#), and expand Temporary Protected Status and other

protections for immigrants already living in this country; (2) Wisconsin Republicans on the Joint Finance Committee to stop blocking driver licenses and in-state tuition equity for immigrants in the state budget, and for (3) Wisconsin School Boards to champion demands for fresh, healthy, and equitable school lunch as part of the “School Lunch Justice” campaign.

[This media toolkit](#) is available to press and includes videos, photos, speeches and more from May Day 1 and May Day 2. Livestream videos are available on [Voces de la Frontera’s Facebook page here](#).

Select highlights from May Day, day 1 include:

Christine Neumann-Ortiz, Executive Director of Voces de la Frontera, said, “This year we celebrate another victory: winning deferred action for undocumented workers who file labor violation complaints. This protected status passed under President Biden in the Department of Labor empowers workers to assert their labor rights without fear of retaliation by granting them a temporary work visa, social security number, and access to a driver license. We demand our rights as workers! We demand that our humanity and that of our families and neighbors and coworkers be respected.” Full speech available [here](#).

Israel Peña, an immigrant essential worker from Green Bay, WI, where Brown County which is a 287(g) affected county said, “My name is Israel Peña and I’ve been an immigrant essential worker for 15 years in this country. We know that Republicans have been blocking drivers licenses, but this is something that all of us need, and all of us support, because immigrants are the economy of this country and of this state. We need drivers licenses to get to work, to take our kids to school, and to go shopping. This is especially important for those who live in Brown County where 287(g) exists, and this policy legalizes racial profiling.”

Tuesday, May 2, the second day of the statewide strike, began with a 200 strong student led-walkout at Madison East High School, where students walked approximately 2 miles to arrive at the Wisconsin State Capitol. They joined students from other high schools, and the student organizations Raza United and UW- Mecha, meeting at the State Street entrance of the Capitol where they held a brief rally outside before holding a press conference in the Capitol rotunda.

The press conference, held simultaneously during the Republican-led Joint Finance Committee (JFC) meeting, which was entirely student-led and organized, featured

students and youth organizers who addressed the urgent need for Wisconsin Republicans to restore driver licenses and in-state tuition for immigrants as well as local school-based demands to hold administration accountable to penalizing racist behavior and protecting ethnic studies.

Select highlights from May Day, day 2 include:

Maryangeliz Acosta Mass, a junior at Madison East High School, and event organizer from Raza United, shared her experiences of growing up in Puerto Rico and needing to overcome culture shock when her family emigrated to Wisconsin to start a new life when she was 10 years-old. Speaking in *'Spanglish'*, she said, "I am a U.S.citizen, but I am aware of the rest of the Latinos and immigrants who are unable to get their licenses or have the same opportunities as I have. Today I fight for and stand with mi gente (*my people*). I fight for hurting familias (*families*) who have been separated. I fight for parents who sacrificed their lives for a better future...We deserve drivers licenses for all. We deserve citizenship for all. We deserve in-state tuition...and we won't stop until we receive the justice we deserve."

[Click here to watch the livestream video](#) or [click here for the media toolkit](#) which includes photos and b-roll video.