

More than 200 march through downtown Fresno to support immigration reform

By Carmen George



Marchers walk east along Fresno Street in downtown Fresno joining the May First Coalition for Immigrants Rights on Friday evening. ERIC PAUL ZAMORA — THE FRESNO BEE | [Buy Photo](#)

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- *“I think more Spanish people work hard than are criminals,” said marcher Raymond Ruiz*
- *Rally organizer Leonel Flores urged local elected officials to do more to support undocumented immigrants in Fresno*

More than 200 people marched through the streets of downtown Fresno on Friday evening to push for comprehensive immigration reform following a rally at Courthouse Park.

Among those who stopped by to listen to speakers and watch traditional Hispanic dancers and singers was Kalim Jabari, a Fresno man of Muslim and African descent.

“This nation would be better, and better served, if there was not a sense of ‘us vs. them,’ ” Jabari said. “It is still the U.S. and it does spell ‘us.’ ”

He stressed that everyone in the United States descends from immigrants — except for indigenous people. The

government shouldn't "lock away people who are coming here willingly to do good work and supply funding to their distant families and relatives across the border and abroad."

Rally coordinator Leonel Flores urged elected city and county officials to do more locally to help with immigration reform. While local leaders can't provide the "total solution," Flores said, they can help by doing things like passing resolutions in support of federal programs such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents.

Marchers passed in front of the Fresno County Sheriff's Office, the Fresno Police Department, City Hall and Fresno's Superior and federal courthouses waving signs with messages like, "I only look illegal" and "Justice for all every day" as around 25 uniformed Fresno police officers on motorcycles lined the streets to keep their path clear.

Among those marching was Raymond Ruiz, a student at Fresno City College and an aspiring business owner. He marched for a better future for his two daughters and against "discrimination."

"I think more Spanish people work hard than are criminals," Ruiz said. He held a flag depicting a drawing of a crying mother huddled beside her husband and small child as a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer comes to arrest them.

"Way too many people are locked-up up there," said speaker Juan Avitia, stopping the march near the Fresno County Jail, "our brothers, our sisters, our sons, our husbands, our grandpas. Not only because of so-called crime, but because they are undocumented."

Avitia is president of the Mexican American Political Association. His association was among a number of groups at the rally and march, including the May 1st Coalition, the Fresno Immigration Coalition and the American Civil Liberties Union.

Also marching was Joy Hernandez, a 28-year-old high Sierra camp worker in Yosemite National Park whose family lives in Fresno. Pushing a bicycle draped in Tibetan prayer flags, Hernandez said of the march, "It makes people feel closer, like we're all family, like we're all connected. If we put our heads together, we can make something happen."

Pedro Elias, director of public affairs for Planned Parenthood in Fresno, said too many hardworking undocumented people in the U.S. are living in fear and shame.

"We are all an image of one another," Elias said. "We are not any different. We are all humans. ... We are the same people."

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