



## Commission the Status of Women Hearing (2)

September 11, 2025

Topic: Impact of ICE enforcement on immigrant women and children in Sonoma County 2025

“Women are the heart of the home and create the mental and emotional stability and ultimately, directly impacts the stability of the entire community.”

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the second in a series of hearings sponsored by the Commission on the Status of Women focusing on the issues and concerns which women face in Sonoma County today. The initial hearing earlier this year “Unheard and Unhoused” focused on the voices of unhoused women.

The purpose of this hearing was to share some of the real life experiences of immigrant women in Sonoma County dealing with ICE enforcement and better understand the impact on their lives and their families through their eyes. Speakers were selected from different parts of the County, different social and civil roles, and different perspectives.

Each speaker was asked to focus on four broad questions:

- (1) In 2025, what most concerns the immigrant women who seek services from you or your program?
- (2) What types of services do immigrant women most need or are requesting in 2025?
- (3) What would these women want policy makers and politicians to understand about the impact of ICE enforcement on immigrant women and their families in Sonoma County?

(4) What do YOU want these policy makers and politicians to understand about the impact of ICE enforcement on immigrant women and their families in Sonoma County?

Concluding recommendations:

All speakers stressed the importance of elected public officials (and the public in general) showing commitment to a meaningful response to the needs of immigrant women and their families. Speakers were emphatic that, on behalf of immigrant women and their families, elected public officials should conscientiously hear the voices of the undocumented community and demonstrate support through adopting law(s) designating Sonoma County as a Sanctuary County.

**Five speakers were invited:**

Maricarmen Reyes (Program Coordinator at Sonoma Valley Community Health Center SVHC), Renee Saucedo (Attorney and community organizer Raizes Collective ), Daisy Carrena (Almas Libres), Bernice Espinoza (Attorney, Sonoma Immigrant Services), and Anna Salgado (KBBF *Compartiendo and Apprendiendo*)

**(1) In 2025, what most concerns the immigrant women who seek services from you or your program?**

**Maricarmen Reyes (Sonoma Valley Community Health Center)**

In Sonoma Valley, the only health care facility that specifically supports immigrant women is the Sonoma Valley Community Health Center (SVHC). One third of the women coming to the Center are without legal status. During recent years there had been an increase in the number of asylum-holders' patients. It is common for clients to come from families with different Immigration status which has a dramatic impact on their wellbeing and state of mind. They may have children born in the USA and have spouses or close relatives with different statuses. These women are concerned about the impact of changes in federal policies including the loss of essential health services. Women come to the Center saying that they fear taking their children to school, bringing them to services or activities, and question if they will be safe in their neighborhood. This fear compounds stress and translates into depression and high anxiety. The SVHC does not have sufficient capacity including staff to help clients with this level of mental health crisis. As a consequence, the entire spectrum of treatment is delayed,

including OB, ER, and treatment for chronic conditions. Younger women with cancer specifically are not following thru with their treatment.

In the last couple of months, there has been a decrease in the volume of patients coming for services due to loss of coverage. Twenty seven percent of the population in Sonoma Valley is Latino. Nepalese and other Asian communities in the Valley are also impacted by changes in ICE enforcement and policies.

**Renee Saucedo, community organizer @ Raizes Collective and special guest Daisy Carrena (Almas Libres) spoke about the broad needs facing immigrant women and their families.**

The impact on daily lives is deep and palpable in Sonoma County. Immigrant women are seeing their loved ones being arrested and dehumanized and criminalized. Immigrant women live with fear in all aspects of their lives, e.g., not knowing whom to leave their children with if they are detained by ICE, not going to school when rumors of ICE presence are circulating, and fear of going to shop to prepare meals. “It is so hard to come home and having children say, “thank you mom for coming home”. They say what will I do tomorrow if you are not here. What will daddy do? Or what will happen to us if daddy is taken?” The entire community has been affected. ICE has come and taken families away, and people in our community are hiding. ICE and the threat of ICE enforcement action has impacted even the members and leaders of **Almas Libres**, making women fear attending meetings. **Almas Libres** is a support system empowering woman which helps them learn how to live day to day without constantly thinking about these traumatizing circumstances. Speakers shared the voice of the community “We firmly believe that elected public officials including the Board of Supervisors, should do their job and the work that the community needs. “

## **(2) What services do immigrant women most need or are requesting in 2025?**

Legal services for immigrant women and their families are in high demand. Existing resources are overloaded, and the complexities of immigration law and detention have multiplied. Within a single family, multiple legal status can exist which correlate to different rules and regulations, e.g., temporary protective status, legal permanent status, U visas, victim of violent crimes, student visa, convention against torture status, tourist visa, worker visa, DACA. Many of the new immigration policies are attempting to strip away specific statuses. The line between having status or permission or applicant for status to *no status* can now change overnight

Increase in the number of people detained has had a tremendous impact on immigration legal services and immigration attorneys. Clients in detention, often detained in intentionally remote locations (e.g., Kern County), require a huge outlay of work and expense. Last year, advocates in Sonoma County successfully petitioned the Board of Supervisors to authorize funds to hire an attorney to represent persons who are removed by ICE and detained in another county. Unfortunately, that attorney's caseload is already much larger than anticipated.

Legal services are provided to immigrant women and their families through multiple programs, e.g., the immigration health collaborative or Sonoma County Secure Families collaborative, the African diaspora immigrant project, Immigration Legal Services, VIDAS, and the Family Resource Center collaborative spearheaded by La Luz in Sonoma Valley.

**(3) What do these immigrant women want policy makers and elected public officials to understand about the impact of ICE enforcement on them and their families in Sonoma County?**

Speakers agreed that based on what they are seeing and hearing that immigrant women want local leaders, specifically the Board of Supervisors, to understand how deeply their daily lives are affected by ICE enforcement. ICE enforcement and even the threat of ICE enforcement, creates constant fear, making these women hesitant to seek medical care, send their children to school, or even leave their homes. That fear impacts their health, their ability to work, and compounds emotional stress on their families, especially their children.

Immigrant women want public policies that focus on keeping families together, with more mental health support, and spaces where they feel safe. Their hope is to live, work, and care for their families without fear. "Women are the heart of the home and create the mental and emotional stability and ultimately, directly impacts the stability of the entire community."

Having elected officials better understand what immigrant women and their families experience day to day would help them learn to trust and defer to the experiences of the undocumented community. Their request is that Sonoma County adopt a Sanctuary policy as a clear statement of support for these women and their families.

**(4) What do you want policy makers and politicians such as the Board of Supervisors to understand about the impact of ICE enforcement on immigrant women and their families in Sonoma County?**

## **Bernice Espinoza, Sonoma Immigrant Services**

The role of policy makers and elected public officials is especially important now to immigrants and their wellbeing in Sonoma County. Earlier this year, the Board of Supervisors approved \$500K for immigration education, which was significant but less than advocates recommended to meet the needs. Advocates recommend that the County be proactive by looking at the **state** of immigrants in Sonoma County in the same way that the Portrait of Sonoma County has evaluated health and related issues. This speaker agreed with community advocates who recommended a comprehensive assessment be undertaken to determine needs, access, and service gaps. Questions should be asked and answered about what types of services are being provided by county agencies and what needs to be provided. Despite the many nonprofits in Sonoma County, because of funding limitations, they do not have capacity to conduct the in depth research necessary to collect that type of data. As a consequence, advocates have not had sufficient data to successfully persuade the BOS board to pivot from being reactive to generating an affirmative immigration initiative.

As an experienced criminal and immigration lawyer, the speaker stressed the growing demand on her for legal assistance and the need to expand funding for such services county wide. One of the major challenges for lawyers working with immigrants is changing immigration policy, which is methodically eliminating statuses, including policies that now require mandatory detention and mean more family separation. “I have personally seen women not filling out necessary forms because it is too scary, they don’t want to do it... We are also seeing case law eliminating asylum as the basis of gender and family – which means that if we cannot defend individuals in immigration court on these bases, they will end up deported and possibly, dead.” Vicarious trauma also impacts the lawyers, judges and court personnel. The vast majority of immigration attorneys are women, and of the seven judges removed from Immigration Court in San Francisco most were women.

## **Anna Salgado @ KBBF *Compartiendo y Apprendiendo***

Anna Salgado spoke from the perspective of a person who has the privilege to work in public radio and have the opportunity to expand the message of people in this community. Anna joined KBBF seven years ago. This show has been broadcast for 50 years, and people trust it *like a dear aunt*. Some do not speak English, and not even Spanish well. “In my experience, also important is to have

the opportunity and blessing to be able to self-express safely without fear of being silenced. It is a privilege to be here today and express myself.”

The Hearing concluded with a poem by Anna Salgado in which she stressed “... we need to listen to the needs of *the community*. *This community* that dreamed of being different is why they are here.”

POEM – spoken in Spanish.

### ***Resilience***

Resilience just as leaves fall at the end of autumn.

Without noise, without glory without anything; however, a seed was born in my heart, and I learned that losing is also living.

The wind spoke to me and took away from me my voice to sing.

But each wound was like an open heart through which light could come through. I was mud, I was shade, I was a dark night.

But down deep I had the sun shining.

Not everything that was broken was turned to ashes, there is fire that comes from pain itself. I became of stone but not cold stone.

I became water but did not run away. I walk in between thorns and ruins, my soul understood what living looks like.

Because strength doesn't screen it soars in silence. Resilience is not falling; it's about getting up and continuing forward.

Continuing with a broken soul but with determination my brothers and sisters hope that the sun will shine again.

## SOME ACTION STEPS FOR GOVERNMENTAL LEADERS TO ADVANCE THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL

- Adopt a County Sanctuary Policy affirming that no county resources or personnel will be used to enforce federal immigration laws. Ensure all county departments, including health, education, and public safety, implement training on sanctuary principles and immigrant rights protections
- Expand legal aid funding for immigration services, including representation for detained individuals and families facing removal.
- Direct the County Administrator's Office to conduct an Immigrant Well-Being and Access Assessment, modeled on The Portrait of Sonoma County, identifying service gaps, access barriers, and priority needs. Require annual progress reporting to the Board of Supervisors and the public on the findings.
- Fund bilingual, culturally responsive mental-health and trauma-recovery services specifically for immigrant women and children. Support training for front-line staff and educators in trauma-informed approaches when serving immigrant families.
- Ensure all county schools and childcare facilities are *safe zones*, free from immigration enforcement activity. Develop clear protocols for responding to ICE presence or rumors, communicated in multiple languages to school staff and parents.
- Support multilingual media initiatives (e.g., KBBF's Compartiendo y Apprendiendo) to build trust and disseminate accurate information in multiple languages.

Thank you

Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)