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May 20, 2008

Hon. Michael Chertoff
Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
Nebraska Ave, Center NW
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

We are writing to express our utter outrage that the Border Patrol would jeopardize the safety of residents of the Rio Grande Valley in the event of a hurricane evacuation by checking the documents of evacuees before they are allowed to board evacuation buses. If you are interested in undercutting the safety of a large segment of the community you are charged with protecting, this is exactly the way to go about it. Indeed, the very news that such an effort is planned, which was reported by the *Rio Grande Guardian* on May 14, has already undercut the ability of the federal government to protect the population which could be affected by a hurricane or some other natural disaster.

To put it quite simply, a substantial segment of the population -- immigrants and U.S. citizens alike -- will not participate in an evacuation effort if they believe it to be tainted with the goal of immigration enforcement. Americans with immigrant family members will not participate for fear of jeopardizing their loved ones. In addition, most American citizens do not carry documentation that proves their citizenship. If you proceed with this approach, a great many U.S. citizens will be kept off of evacuation buses because they failed to bring their passports and birth certificates when they fled their homes. To put such people on Border Patrol buses and subject them to immigration enforcement, possibly separating them from their family members in a time of crisis, is foolish and offensive.

We have written to you on this subject in the past, when your decision not to suspend immigration enforcement in the wake of Hurricane Katrina made this the first Administration of either party to jeopardize the safety of disaster victims by conducting immigration enforcement during a rescue and relief operation. We have pointed out publicly that insisting on immigration enforcement in a time of crisis will jeopardize the safety of the American public by undercutting public confidence in vitally important public safety and public health initiatives. To put it bluntly, if the next major crisis is a flu epidemic, the actions of your agency will guarantee that major segments of the population will not come forward for vaccinations out of fear of immigration enforcement.

This tactic by the Border Patrol is not simply offensive, it is dangerous, and we are shocked and outraged that it has proceeded this far. We urge you in the strongest possible terms to

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suspend it immediately, and reassure the public that the United States will not undercut our security in a time of crisis by asking for papers before taking people to safety.

Sincerely,

Karen Narasaki
Asian American Justice Center

Rosa Rosales
League of United Latin American Citizens

John Trasvina
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund

Arturo Vargas
National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials

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National Council of La Raza