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# New immigrant rights coalition wants to keep Carpinteria connected and informed

BY EVELYN SPENCE

Two locals — Becki Norton and Deborah Dentler — are launching the Carpinteria Immigrant Rights Coalition, hoping to keep immigrants informed of their rights amid the recent deportation policies introduced under President Donald Trump and his administration.

"My concerns are really focused on one thing: whether the community of Carpinteria is adequately prepared for whatever might come," Dentler told *Coastal View News* last week. "(...) What can I do to help inform members of the community, and help reduce unnecessary panic and fear?"

Norton added: "The main goal is to protect and empower immigrants, as allies."

Earlier this year, Norton, a bilingual teacher and school psychologist, was spurred by immigration enforcement in Santa Barbara County to launch an immigrant rights committee under political advocacy group Carpinteria Indivisible.

However, after realizing this issue needed more attention beyond a sub-committee, she met up with others — including Dentler — and stepped down as co-chair of Carpinteria Indivisible to form a coalition dedicated specifically to immigrant rights.

Dentler, a retired lawyer who worked with foster care cases, is a literacy tutor with the Carpinteria Library; her husband Tony Segall, who is trilingual, has been helping with the Carpinteria Community Library's citizenship preparation classes. The couple, with several other groups, helped put on a "Know Your Rights" forum for immigrant families at the library in December.

"We were thinking about things at the exact same time," Norton said. Dentler added: "We've merged our experiences and ideas and contact lists."

Both Norton and Dentler said immigrant rights are fundamental human rights and must be separated from any other political agendas.

"My hope is that (the coalition) will be very broad based, and it will attract people irrespective of where they stand on the political spectrum, because it's our belief that legal rights are human rights, and they belong to all of us, irrespective of where you stand on any other political



From left, Carpinteria Children Project Family Services Director Jessica Ramirez, with Carpinteria Immigrant Rights Coalition founders Becki Norton and Deborah Dentler.

*"We were hearing from families how fearful they were, anxiety creeping in, there were already a lot of families who were questioning what was going to happen, how to be prepared for what was to come."*

— Jessica Ramirez, director of Family Services at the Carpinteria Children's Project

topic," Dentler said.

Carpinteria hasn't seen a sharp rise in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity, but surrounding communities have, such as the city of Santa Maria and Ventura County. This is creating fear and anxiety locally, Dentler and Norton said.

According to the 2020 census, 22.9% of Carpinteria's roughly 12,800 residents were born outside of the United States, and 35.9% speak a language other than English at home. The Immigrant Legal Defense Center reported that as of December 2024, 2,937 people in Santa Barbara County are facing deportation, and roughly half of them do not have a lawyer.

Dentler and Norton have reached out to local organizations, such as the Carpinteria Children's Project, a childcare and family support agency, to help connect local families and individuals with essential services.

CCP Family Services Director Jessica Ramirez told *Coastal View News* the nonprofit saw a decline in families and individuals coming in for support after the 2024 presidential election.

"We were hearing from families how fearful they were, anxiety creeping in," Ramirez said. "Families weren't coming into their scheduled appointments to enroll into MediCal, CalFresh, out of fear."

Once President Trump took office in January, CCP's service numbers fell ever

lower.

"We had a lot of families show concern, if (ICE) comes, is (CCP) going to let them in?" Ramirez said.

The CCP building is owned by the Carpinteria Unified School District (CUSD), so CCP has been instructed to send ICE officials to the main CUSD administration building and not let agents in if they do show up. Ramirez explained, "I think that provided a little piece of mind to the families that we worked with."

Within the last month, CCP's appointment numbers have started to rise again. They aren't the same as they were before the Trump administration took office, "but they're definitely getting there, and I think it's because folks are getting the information that they need to feel safe and protected enough," she added.

The coalition also hands out Red Cards detailing constitutional rights, flyers outlining what to do if ICE comes to the workplace or how to report ICE in the area, and Family Preparedness Plans — legal documents families can fill out in case they are separated.

Dentler and Norton said they hope to supplement the work local groups and organizations are already doing — not replace it.

"What we need is not a new project or a new organization — we need collaboration," Dentler said. "What we really are is a coalition. We're not the heads of it. It's not a top-down thing. We don't have a decision-making structure. Becki and I are allies to existing projects."

Norton and Dentler have an email up and running, [carpimmigrantcoalition@yahoo.com](mailto:carpimmigrantcoalition@yahoo.com), and are working to launch a quarterly newsletter, *The Pulse/El Pulso*, hopefully in May. The newsletter will host a list of resources, "always taking the pulse of the community," Dentler said.

"Our primary task that we're focusing on right now is getting the word out, saying 'Join us, contact us, and watch for our newsletter,'" she said.

Norton, Dentler and Ramirez all emphasized it's important to stay connected and informed. They said parents should make firm plans and talk to their kids in case a family member is deported or taken in by ICE.

"I have a friend, who happens to be undocumented. Both of her kids were born here. I asked her, 'Are you ready? Have you prepared for this situation?'" Norton said. Her friend has filled out the necessary paperwork, and has plans in place if she is deported from the United States. "I asked her, 'What about some of your other friends? Are they ready?' And she said no."

## Immigrants are important to community

CVN 5-8-25

Thanks for the April 25 story about the Carpinteria Coalition for Immigrant Rights, a new alliance of groups and individuals concerned about the safety and well-being of immigrants who live or work in the Carpinteria Valley. Immigrants are vitally important to our community. They shop at and work in our stores, educate their kids in our schools, join service clubs, patronize the library, open new businesses, and worship in our many churches. We are proud to be their allies in this worrisome time.

After the CVN article (CVN Vol. 31, No. 32) appeared, some readers encountered glitches trying to contact the coalition at the email address we gave the reporter — so we've created a new one. Want to join the Coalition? Interested in volunteering for a service project? Habla Español? We need you! All are welcome. To join the Coalition or subscribe to our bilingual newsletter, *The Pulse/El Pulso*, send an email to our new address: [CarpImmigrantCoalition@yahoo.com](mailto:CarpImmigrantCoalition@yahoo.com). We'd love to hear from you.

**Deborah Dentler  
Carpinteria**