

MIRA discusses backlash against immigrants

JACKSON — If before Sept. 11 it was difficult for many foreigners, both with legal and illegal status, to get their children enrolled in schools or to get a driver's license or a Social Security number in Mississippi, now it is going to be more difficult to obtain them according to members of the Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance (MIRA).

MIRA members met Oct. 4 in Jackson to discuss the backlash against immigrants, specifically those living in Mississippi, and to work on responses to several of these incidents.

Representatives from various religious, labor, social services, civil rights, political and community leaders at the meeting offered their ideas and joined committees to find ways to help individuals who are victims of attack, harassment, discrimination or who are being denied services because of their origin.

Several representatives from MIRA, including Bill Chandler and Rev. Sally Bevil, MIRA co-chairpersons, will meet with representatives from the Mississippi Department of Education and the Jackson School Board to discuss problems some parents are having when they try to enroll their immigrant children in schools

in Mississippi and some abuses/harassment happening in schools around the state.

Bevil also explained some of the problems immigrants encounter when they try to get a driver's license.

"Before Sept. 11, Immigration and Naturalization Service documentation was not required," she said. "But now individuals who want to get a driver's license need to provide these documents".

On Oct. 8, Mississippi's Department of Public Safety began requiring proof of residence for driver's licenses and state-issued photo ID cards.

"It's a scary and sad time, especially for us who have fought so hard and for so long for these rights," Bevil added.

Representatives from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Mississippi presented a communication from their office in Washington stating that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits workplace discrimination based on religion, national origin, race, color, or sex.

The document reads, "At this time, employers and unions should be particularly sensitive to potential discrimination

or harassment against individuals who are — or are perceived to be — Muslim, Arab, Afghan, Middle Eastern or South Asian (Pakistani, Indian, etc.).

The statement specifies employers and labor unions have a special role in guarding against unlawful workplace discrimination.

Patricia Ice, a Jackson attorney, said many of the Immigration and Naturalization Service policy changes are now on hold. Among these laws is the

extension of the 2.45(i) law which gives some immigrants an opportunity to file for change of status without having to leave the country or to apply for immediate family members living outside the United States to be able to come to the U.S.

Several members of MIRA expressed their frustration at incidents of discrimination against all immigrants in general, whether they are Hispanic, European or Middle Eastern.

MIRA!

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