

LOCAL NEWS

Marin leaders press for implementation of health care, immigration reforms

By **MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL** and **JANIS MARA** |

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In a combination pep rally and accountability session, Marin advocates and religious leaders Sunday outlined upcoming federal health care and immigration reforms and pressed public officials including Assemblyman Marc Levine about their commitment to implementing the reforms.

“More than 14,000 people in Marin County will become newly eligible for health insurance in October,” Suzanne Walker, associate director of Marin’s St. Vincent de Paul Society, told an audience of about 400 people from congregations and nonprofits gathered at the Novato High School gym.

Walker was referring to the fact that the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, is expanding the number of people who are eligible for Medi-Cal. People will be able to enroll as of October 1 and receive care starting Jan. 1, 2014, and one of the meeting’s objectives was to prepare for those dates.

“We are concerned that there are not enough eligibility workers to enroll residents, and we need public officials and agencies to act now,” Walker said at the meeting, which was put on by the Marin Organizing Committee and Bay Area Industrial Areas Foundation.

The organizing committee is a group of about 20 dues-paying congregations and nonprofits.



Additionally, “Immigrant reform is imminent, so we are expecting an increased demand for immigration services,” said Meredith Parnell, director of communications at San Rafael’s Congregation Rodef Sholom.

In order to make sure the community has enough resources to handle the demand, the Sunday event’s organizers are holding an immigration summit in late August.

“You committed to a meeting with us but when we arranged a trip to Sacramento, you were not available,” Rodef Sholom Congregant Judith Bloomberg told Levine. “Will you commit to attending our meeting on immigration reform in late August?”

“Either I or my staff will be there,” Levine answered. Asked whether he would commit to meeting in person for at least one hour every three months with representatives of the organizing committee, Levine agreed. “It is incredibly important for me to meet with you. I pledge to meet with you,” he said.

Organizing committee representatives similarly grilled Marin County Supervisor Susan Adams, who committed to attending the immigration summit. Adams also committed to meeting with Bay Area IAF in what the group described as monthly health reform checkups.

These meetings would help make sure the right steps would be taken to implement health care reform in Marin.

Larry Meredith, Marin’s director of health and human services, also was questioned.

“Will you commit to hiring an additional 10 Medi-Cal eligibility workers by August 1 for a total of 20 new hires?” Bloomberg asked Meredith. The director pledged to do so.

Members of the coalition rallied the audience throughout the meeting, asking such questions as, “Are you ready to do some serious work? Are you ready to learn? Are you ready to act?”

The questions drew enthusiastic replies of “Yes!” along with clapping and cheering.

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