

Pressure grows on Cuellar to support discharge petition

By Steve Taylor

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HARLINGEN, RGV – **Valley Interfaith** leaders are putting pressure on U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar to support a congressional maneuver that will bring immigration legislation to the floor of the House.

A discharge petition allows a bill to come before the full House even if it has been bogged down in committee. The House leadership has been blocking consideration of immigration legislation that will allow undocumented students known as Dreamers from earning a pathway to citizenship.

The number of lawmakers needed to bring a discharge petition to the floor of the House is 218. Supporters of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) legislation have 215 signatures after U.S. Reps. Filemon Vela of Brownsville and Vicente Gonzalez of McAllen last week announced they were signing on. That happened after meetings with Valley Interfaith. Monday is the deadline for the discharge petition to be brought to the House.

Valley Interfaith sent 10,000 pro-DACA cards to congressional leaders.

“With Representatives Vela and Gonzalez joining onto the Discharge petition we are still three signatures shy of the 218 needed to bring this simply to the floor. We are discouraged that my

congressman, Congressman Cuellar, has maintained his stance and I urge all residents that live in his district to call him and urge him to support the Discharge petition,” said Pastor Bill Duke, from First United Methodist Church in Mission.

“I state this also as a pastor for First United Methodist Church in Mission. I call on him to support the discharge petition and to let democracy work.”

Duke made his comments at a news conference held by Valley Interfaith at Queen of Peace Catholic Church in Harlingen. Bishop Daniel Flores was at the news conference. He thanked Valley Interfaith both for keeping Dreamers in the public eye and seeking a congressional solution to the impasse on immigration reform.

“They (Dreamers) are already contributing so much to our community, in terms of sharing the fruits of their education with others,” Flores said.

Flores later issued this statement:

“I am encouraged by the decision of the Congressional delegation representing the Rio Grande Valley to support the discharge petition before the U.S. House of Representatives that provides a legislative way forward to protect Dreamers. These are difficult times for DACA students, living in uncertainty and fear, and I am hopeful that the decision by our elected representatives will help move Congressional action forward. I urge leaders of both parties to act responsibly and with courage to break the current deadlock in Congress and secure a permanent Congressional solution to the plight of the Dreamers.”

In his remarks, Pastor Duke said the work of pro-immigrant supporters has only just begun.

“We must still continue our diligence to fight for a solution that keeps families together and focuses on the personhood of our Dreamers. We all are immigrants in this country in some way or another. We all should be able to live the American Dream,” Duke said.

He then listed the legislation Valley Interfaith supports and opposes.

“As they are written, we do support the Dream Act, which is sponsored by Roybal Allard and the U.S. Act, which is sponsored by Hurd and Aguilar, that provides pathways to citizenships for DACA students and youth, and the U.S. Act provides money for additional border security. However, we stand opposed to the Secure America’s Future Act which is sponsored by Representative Goodlatte. A solution that does not offer a pathway to citizenship simply is not an option. And any bill that would separate families is unacceptable and in my opinion immoral.”

Msr. Heberto Diaz, pastor of St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Brownsville, emceed the news conference.

“Our faith compels us to welcome the immigrant, as we were once immigrants in a foreign land. Congress has the opportunity to act to support the thousands of Dreamers who were brought here as children – to no fault of their own. As pastors, we know countless DACA students who attend out

parishes. We continue to urge Congress to act on the Discharge Petition and to fight for our DACA students,” said Diaz, in a Valley Interfaith news release.

In the same document, Eddie Anaya, a Valley Interfaith executive committee leader with St. Francis Cabrini in Las Milpas, said, “We are hopeful that our Congressmen will continue to act for all DACA students here – and for all who are and will be eligible.”

In the same news release, United Methodist’s Duke said: “The bible is clear that we are to welcome the immigrant. This is an issue that affects people – and therefore we stand united as people of faith for our immigrant brothers and sisters. This is a moment for the Valley to take a national role in the immigration debate. We will urge Congress, and specifically our congressmen, to be the leaders this nation needs.”

Valley Interfaith is a broad-based community organization with institutional members across the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Its purpose is the development of community leaders who organize the people of their communities to develop effective strategies to deal with issues that affect the welfare of families. Issues include education, housing, job training, health care, and infrastructure, among others. The organization is nonpartisan and does not support candidates for public office, political parties or political philosophies. Valley Interfaith is part of the Industrial Areas Foundation network of organizations that includes 12 organizations throughout Texas.

Roll Call Senior editor David Hawkings explained what a discharge petition does. Click [here](#) to read his analysis.

House Majority Leader Paul Ryan is not in support of the discharge petition. “I think our members realize that it’s better to have a process that has a chance of going into law than not,” Ryan said. Click [here](#) to read *Time*’s most recent news article about the congressional maneuver.