

## guest commentary

by Juan Carlos Ramos

### Why I Got Arrested

I got arrested on Oct. 8. And, my mom was proud of me. In fact, I did it for her.

I got arrested with 200 other activists and eight members of Congress in a peaceful act of civil disobedience. I got arrested in front of the U.S. Capitol because we must send a loud message to Congress that the time is now to pass comprehensive, compassionate immigration reform with a path to citizenship.

I got arrested for the 11 million undocumented immigrants who dream about becoming U.S. citizens, being able to drive a car, travel without fear and get a college degree.

I got arrested for the 267,000 LGBT immigrants like me who will benefit from immigration reform if the one-year bar on applying for asylum is eliminated, if conditions are improved for people held in detention facilities and if detainees aren't placed in solitary confinement solely based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Some are suggesting that we offer undocumented immigrants work permits, but not full citizenship. That approach would leave millions of people in a permanent underclass. Others are suggesting that Congress should address the status of immigrant youth only and leave the rest of the 11 million aside.

We are mobilizing for all 11 million, who are Americans in all but paperwork. In fact, as DREAMers with United We Dream, including the LGBT people who have played such a critical role in the fight for reform, we have spoken out strongly against policies that would give us a path to citizenship, but deport our parents. We don't want half-measures that don't fix our broken immigration system once and for all.

We don't want any more families to be separated. While Congress continues to debate reform, we must stop deportations that tear

families apart. Every day that Congress fails to act, 1,100 families are separated. This must end.

We have an historic opportunity to get it done and get it right. This is the best chance we've had in a generation to pass real immigration reform that provides protections for our families and gives us a chance to fully contribute.

The time is now for a real solution: reform with citizenship. We want nothing less than an inclusive path to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants and an end to senseless deportations.

Our movement is strong and getting stronger every day. Support for reform comes from across the country and across the political spectrum. Our movement is comprised of immigrant, ethnic, faith, labor, business, LGBT, progressive and conservative groups. We will not stop until immigration reform is enacted. We believe that America works best when the "them" become "us" so that all of us become stronger.

Getting arrested to demonstrate my support — my urgent need — for

immigration reform was a difficult decision. But, it was the clearest message I could send to Congress that we must pass immigration reform now because we must remind Congress there are millions of other people like me whose families suffer every day because of our immigration system. :

— Juan Ramos, originally from El Salvador, calls Charlotte, N.C., home, where he is involved with United 4 the Dream, a local immigrant rights organization.

He is also a member of United We Dream's National Coordinating Committee and UWD's Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project.

discrimination protections for public employees. Now, we must turn our attention to those who need the same protections in the private sector. And, we must begin to address other important topics that affect the health and well-being of not only our own community, but also of our allies.

We must institute awareness campaigns, activism and advocacy and lean on our leaders — elected and otherwise — to make change on issues like hunger, poverty and economic privilege, affordable housing and homelessness, the all-too-unjust criminal justice system, alcohol and drug abuse, prostitution and sexual exploitation, reproductive rights and sexual freedom and privacy, along with the dramatically rising HIV/AIDS infection rate. Minorities of all stripes — LGBT people, women, people of color — are affected by each of these intersecting issues.

Making truly progressive, sustainable change is hard work. It takes dedication and sacrifice. It is never solely achieved in a suit and tie or at fancy fundraising dinners. Many in Charlotte are yearning for change. Many have already begun the hard work required for it. They deserve applause and our united support. Let's join them and craft a Charlotte we can all be proud to call home. :



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## Editor's Note

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Time Out Youth Center and Campus Pride, the reaction of our community's leading organizations — the LGBT Community Center, MeckPAC, the Charlotte Business Guild, PFLAG and others — was silence. As I wrote at the time, "Their unwillingness to act on, or, perhaps, their complete ignorance of, the situation was a lost opportunity to build bridges with progressive allies across racial, sexual, health, political and religious lines." (For more on that, revisit goqnotes.com/4805/ and goqnotes.com/6041/.)

Our allies are leading for us, when and where they can. Three black Mecklenburg County commissioners stood in our place on Oct. 15 when our community, and their advocacy on behalf of us, was attacked by their colleagues. We have a debt to pay.

### Expanding the movement

And, while we are working with allies, we must begin to recognize that our movement is about more than just marriage. Local advocacy groups like MeckPAC have done their part to raise debate on topics like employment non-

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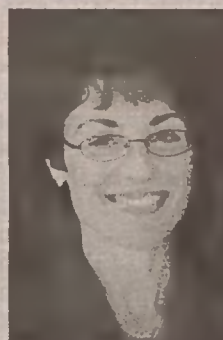
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