

## Basic Media Guide for Immigrant Workers

April 2004

*When advocating for legal or policy changes that can help improve the lives of immigrants and the communities we live in, using the media can be a very effective tool. By talking to the media: you can help put a human face on the problems immigrants face, you get to tell our own story and in your own words, highlight the contributions immigrants make to the U.S. economy and society as a whole, and shine a light on the exploitation immigrants suffer at the hands of employers or the adverse impact of bad policies.*

*However, it is important to protect yourself when talking to the media. Media coverage can be risky for undocumented immigrants, and there are even risks for non-U.S. citizens who have legal status. Remember that the press may want more information than you may want to give—it is okay to follow the below guidelines and refuse to answer certain questions. These guidelines are meant to help you protect yourself, something you can do while still getting your story and message across to the press.*

### The main risks of press coverage are as follows:

- You may come to the attention of immigration authorities or others who wish you harm if your real name is used and you are identified as an undocumented immigrant. This is *not* a common occurrence but it has been known to happen, particularly to persons who live in small towns where they may be seen and recognized.
- You may come to the attention of immigration authorities or others who wish you harm if the newspaper story includes your photograph. If your photo is identified as that of an undocumented immigrant, even without your name, you may be recognized. Again, this risk is greatest in smaller areas.
- If you have legal status but are not a U.S. citizen, you may face problems in the future if you give information and details about your immigration case. This is especially true for people who are in deportation proceedings (are fighting their case in front of an immigration judge). Do *not* ever provide information to the media that contradicts the facts of your immigration case.

### How you can protect your security while talking to the press:

*If you are concerned about any of the above risks, below are some suggestions:*

- Let the reporter know that you want to be anonymous, or that you want to use a fictitious name. Give only your first name, or a made-up first and last name. If you want to use a made-up name, do *not* use the name of anyone you know. However, it is important that you let the report know about this ahead of time. Be honest. Reporters are used to dealing with similar types of situations.



National  
Immigration  
Law Center  
[www.nilc.org](http://www.nilc.org)

#### NATIONAL IMMIGRATION LAW CENTER

Los Angeles Headquarters  
3435 Wilshire Blvd  
Suite 2850  
Los Angeles, CA 90010  
213 639-3900  
213 639-3911 fax

Washington, DC  
1101 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Suite 410  
Washington, DC 20005  
202 216-0261  
202 216-0266 fax

Oakland, CA  
405 14<sup>th</sup> Street  
Suite 1400  
Oakland, CA 94612  
510 663-8282  
510 663-2028

## NATIONAL IMMIGRATION LAW CENTER

- If you are providing identifying information to the report (your full name, the city in which you live, etc.), do not answer questions regarding your immigration status. For example, if the reporter asks you, “Are you undocumented?” or “What is your immigration status now?” you can reply, “I prefer not to answer that question. The important thing is that I am a worker.”
- Do not give any information about how you came to the U.S., what immigration applications you may have filed, or whether you are or have been in immigration detention or deportation proceedings.
- It is *especially important* to not talk about any of the following:
  - ✓ Whether you have been deported before;
  - ✓ Whether you have ever used any false documents or identification (someone else’s passport or birth certificate, a fake social security number, a false green card or work permit, etc.);
  - ✓ Any crimes that you pled guilty to or were convicted of.
- Do not have your photograph taken by the press as part of the story. However, if you do want a photo included, you can agree beforehand with the reporter that the picture will be blurred or darkened or will otherwise not allow anyone to identify you (for example, a photo of your back).
- If you decide to appear on a television show, you can also agree beforehand with the reporter to have your image be altered or put in a shadow. If you decide to speak on a TV or radio show, remember that you can request to have your voice electronically altered so that you won’t be recognized.