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Iowa LULAC disappointed with Gov. Branstad's remarks, continues efforts to help children fleeing Central American violence

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DES MOINES – The League of United Latin American Citizens of Iowa today expressed its disappointment in Gov. Terry Branstad's remarks that he does not want Iowa to host any of the thousands of unaccompanied children who have fled violence in Central America and have sought refuge in the United States.

Iowa LULAC State Director Joe Enriquez Henry said Iowa LULAC would continue to work with its national office, as well as other nonprofit and civic organizations throughout the state, specifically eastern Iowa to do everything it could to help these children.

“This goes against everything that Iowa represents,” Enriquez Henry said. “Our state has a reputation going back almost 40 years of helping those in need from other countries, and these are children who have fled horrifying conditions. Regardless of their citizenship status, it is our duty to assist them in any way possible.”

Enriquez Henry pointed to the actions of Gov. Robert Ray in the late 1970s. Under Ray's leadership, Iowa welcomed about 1,400 Tai Dam refugees, who had escaped persecution, danger and were forced out of their homeland in Southeast Asia.

Iowa LULAC, led by Council 10 in Davenport, tonight is meeting with a group that is part of a community-wide effort that Davenport Mayor Bill Gluba has organized to assist the Central American children. Gluba has created a “Caring Cities Campaign,” which would make Davenport a safe haven for the children who are currently being detained in the southern U.S. border states.

Enriquez Henry has called on Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie to organize a similar effort in the capital city.

“We need to take the steps necessary to ensure these children especially those who are now within our borders are safe,” Enriquez Henry said. “We cannot allow this continue on our watch.”

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Branstad today said he has empathy for the children but that the first step necessary was to secure the border, and that he did not want to send the message that it is acceptable to send children to the United States illegally.

Under current law, immigrant children from other countries that do not border the United States and who cross into the country by themselves are turned over to federal authorities. They are then often reunited with parents or placed with other relatives who already live in the United States while they await an immigration court to decide their future. The process oftentimes takes years.

Founded in 1929, the League of United Latin American Citizens is the oldest Latino civil rights organization in the United States. There are more than 2 million members in more than 1,000 local LULAC councils, which hold voter registration drives, provide awareness to residents about language and immigration issues, sponsor programs and advocate for Latinos.

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