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Press Contacts:

David Bennion, david.bennion@freemigrate.org, (646) 441-0741

Peter Pedemonti, peter@sanctuaryphiladelphia.org, (215) 756-6445

Mother in Sanctuary Wins her Freedom After 554 Days

Suyapa and her 4 kids beat their deportation and will walk free on March 12th

Philadelphia, March 6, 2020 - After spending more than 500 days in Sanctuary at the First United Methodist Church of Germantown (FUMCOG), Suyapa Reyes and her four children have won their campaign and can safely leave Sanctuary. Suyapa was granted deferred action by the federal government. We celebrate the courage and persistence of Suyapa and her family.

At a time when the Trump Administration escalates its attacks on immigrant communities through policies like its new programs of surveillance and targeted operations in Sanctuary Cities, restricting claims for asylum, and delaying and slowing cases of those in Sanctuary, Suyapa and a broad community came together to fight laws that terrorize so many families in Philadelphia and the country.

**“I feel like a bird in the sky with my wings spread. I am so happy that I won my freedom.”
- Suyapa Reyes**

Suyapa and her family were targeted by ICE, as many asylum-seeking families have been, and threatened with separation from her four children. The Obama administration wrongly denied her asylum case, and the Trump administration forced her into sanctuary when they moved to deport her. Suyapa fought to keep her family together and won. This victory demonstrates the power of communities coming together, acting boldly in the face of extremist laws.

“Immigrant mothers like Suyapa and Carmela are putting their bodies on the line to challenge the broken asylum system and the broken immigration system that is designed to break families apart. With this victory we prove that mothers, families and communities organizing in love and faith are not only strong enough to take down systems, but to rebuild systems.” -Blanca Pacheco, Co-Director of NSM

“In the Christian liturgical calendar, we are currently in the season of Lent. Lent is a time that mirrors the 40 days that Jesus spent hungry and thirsty in the desert-- like many

undocumented immigrants do. Lent is a time that mirrors the 40 years that the Israelites spent in the desert seeking the Promised Land. And it shows us that perseverance and patience are true virtues. Today, Suyapa and her children have persevered.” -Rev. Noé Gabriel López, Associate Pastor of The First United Methodist Church of Germantown.

We are grateful for the broad community that came together to fight with Suyapa, especially FUMCOG, New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia, and Free Migration Project.

Suyapa’s U Visa application was approved, but the visa cannot be issued yet due to the annual 10,000 U Visa cap. However, this approval means that United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) granted Suyapa a deferred action, a similar status as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, and protects her from deportation by United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

“Suyapa faced obstacles from the federal government in the form of processing delays and a threatened denial of her case, despite her case meeting all the legal requirements for a U Visa,” said David Bennion of Free Migration Project, Suyapa’s attorney. “Fortunately, the government decided to follow the law and approved her case. We hope support from the community and members of Congress can also hold the government accountable with our client Carmela’s U Visa case.”

Suyapa will officially come out of Sanctuary on Thursday, March 12, 2020, at FUMCOG at 5:00pm. Suyapa and members of the community will gather and walk a few blocks down to Carmela Apolonio and her children, who are in sanctuary at Germantown Mennonite Church.

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New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia is an interfaith, multicultural immigrant justice movement organizing congregations to end injustices against immigrants, regardless of status.

Free Migration Project is a nonprofit organization that represents immigrant clients in their legal proceedings, provides legal support and training to organizers, and advocates for fair and open immigration laws.