

July 29, 2015

Jaime C. Alfaro  
Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
San Antonio Field Office  
8940 Fourwinds  
San Antonio, TX, 78239

**Re: Request to stop the deportation of Sulma Carina Franco-Chamale**

Dear Mr. Alfaro:

As faith leaders representing multiple religious traditions, we the undersigned are writing to urge you to stop the deportation of **Sulma Carina Franco-Chamale**, who has been taking sanctuary at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin, Texas since June 11, 2015.

Sulma, a known activist for LGBT rights in Guatemala, fled for her life and sought asylum in the U.S. after facing abuse, violence and death threats in her home country. There are credible reports from the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Coalition that the government of Guatemala is responsible for extrajudicial killings of members of the LGBT community.<sup>1</sup> Sulma is also a survivor of human trafficking and crime. We will not remain silent and let an innocent woman be removed from our community and sent to certain harm or death.

When she first arrived to the United States, Sulma spent four months in the Hutto Detention Center in Taylor, Texas before being released after passing her credible fear interview, the threshold for winning an asylum case. After leaving detention, she was able to obtain a social security number and work permit that enabled her to become part of the Austin community. During this time, Sulma presented herself every three months at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) office as per her agreement, demonstrating that she is not a flight risk. Four years later, she was shocked when she showed up to one of these periodic meetings only to learn that because of an error by her attorney at the time, she was going to be detained and deported. Sulma was sent to detention in Laredo for two months and to Phoenix, Arizona for six months. She was eventually released after paying a bond of \$15,000. Even after paying this large sum, three months later she was sent an order of deportation. While Sulma fought for asylum for six long years, she became a beloved member of the Austin community and a business owner when she opened a food truck with her partner. This same community now gathers to support her.

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<sup>1</sup> "Human Rights Violations of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) People in Guatemala: A Shadow Report," May 9, 2012, <http://iglhrc.org/content/human-rights-violations-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-lgbt-people-guatemala-shadow>

We write today to say that we want Sulma to stay. Not only does Sulma not meet ICE priority removal requirements,<sup>2</sup> but by forcing her into sanctuary ICE has ensured that she cannot provide for her own material needs. Members of faith communities and other people of conscience have arisen to take care of Sulma by visiting and sharing meals and will continue to do so until she is granted permission to stay in the United States.

We cannot ignore the call to “welcome the stranger” and “love our neighbor,” as we are taught by our faith traditions. We believe that everyone, regardless of national origin, has basic common rights, including but not limited to livelihood, and physical and emotional safety. Our belief is that ordering Sulma to be deported to Guatemala violates her rights and puts her life at risk. We stand together against this injustice.

We are taking a public, moral stand for Sulma’s rights, and to make our community more safe and welcoming for all immigrants. We will continue to stand by her until she is granted permission to remain in our country, in the community in which she has become a valued and integral member.

Sincerely,

Rev. Lora Brandis  
Unitarian Universalist  
Dallas, TX

Rev. Chris Jimmerson, Asst.  
Minister  
First Unitarian Universalist  
Church of Austin  
Austin, TX

Chloe Sikes  
First Unitarian Universalist  
Church of Austin  
Austin, TX

Rev. Marisol Caballero,  
Assistant Minister  
1st Unitarian Universalist  
Church of Austin  
Austin, TX

Scottie McIntyre Johnson,  
Candidate for Ministry  
Unitarian Universalist Church  
San Marcos, TX

Rev. Mark Skrabacz, Minister  
San Gabriel Unitarian  
Universalist Fellowship  
Georgetown  
Georgetown, TX

Patricia Chavez, Family  
Minister  
Catedral de la Esperanza  
Lewisville, TX

Rabbi Nancy Kasten  
Dallas, TX

Mykal Slack, Founder  
4LYFE Ministries  
Durham, NC

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<sup>2</sup> Johnson, Jeh. Department of Homeland Security, “Policies for the Apprehension, Detention and Removal of Undocumented Immigrants,” November 20, 2014, [http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/14\\_1120\\_memo\\_prosecutorial\\_discretion.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/14_1120_memo_prosecutorial_discretion.pdf)

Rev. Joseph Cleveland  
Unitarian Universalist  
Congregation of Saratoga  
Springs  
Saratoga Springs, NY

Harriett Kelley, Chaplain  
Church of Natural Grace  
San Francisco, CA

Frank Sloan  
St. Andrew's Presbyterian  
Church  
Austin, TX

Rabbi Amy Cohen  
Temple Beth Shalom  
Austin, TX

Mary Grace Ketner  
First Unitarian Universalist  
Church San Antonio  
San Antonio, TX

Larry Smith  
Live Oak Unitarian  
Universalist Church  
Immigration Action Team  
Austin, TX

Rev. Joanna Crawford  
Live Oak UU Church  
Round Rock, TX

Rev. Alfred Krebs, Pastor  
Prince of Peace Lutheran  
Church  
Austin, TX

Allison Thompson, Ruling  
Elder  
St. Andrew's Presbyterian  
Church  
Austin, TX

Beth Dana  
First Unitarian Church of  
Dallas  
Dallas, TX

Morgan Landry  
Westside Unitarian  
Universalist Church  
Fort Worth, TX

Carolina Trevino, Christian  
Educator  
Central Presbyterian Church  
Austin, TX

Danielle Di Bona  
Unitarian Universalist Church  
of Weymouth, MA  
Weymouth, MA

Isabel Marquez, Pastor  
Cathedral of Hope  
Dallas, TX

Michelle Walsh, Community  
Minister  
Unitarian Universalist  
Revere, MA

Adam Dyer  
California Equity Ministry  
Oakland, CA

Mario Marquez  
Non-denominational  
Dallas, TX

Erin Walter, Intern Minister  
Wildflower Church  
(Unitarian Universalist)  
Austin, TX

Carol Edwards  
Committee Chair  
First Unitarian Universalist  
Church of Austin  
Austin, TX

Kym McNair  
Antioch Baptist Church  
Bedford Hills, NY

Durrell Watkins, Senior  
Minister  
Sunshine Cathedral  
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Rev. Ken Ehrke  
United Church of Christ  
Arlington, TX

Kristen Melcher, Elder  
Universal Life Church  
Dallas, TX

Mona West, Director Office  
of Formation and Leadership  
Development  
Metropolitan Community  
Churches  
Austin, TX

Rev. Kathleen Ellis  
First Unitarian Universalist  
Church of Austin  
Austin, TX

Tom Mitchell, Honorably  
Retired Pastor  
St. Andrew's Presbyterian  
Church  
Austin, TX

Glenda Whitehead, Pastor  
Journey of Faith United  
Methodist Church  
Round Rock, TX

Mohamed-Umer Esmail,  
Resident Scholar  
Nueces Mosque  
Austin, TX

Pamela Morales  
Catholic Church  
Arlington, TX

Kimberly Wildszewski,  
Minister  
Unitarian Universalist Church  
at Washington Crossing,  
Titusville  
Titusville, NJ

Kate Fox  
St. Andrew's Presbyterian  
Church  
Austin, TX

Peggy Morton, Inside Amigos  
Chair  
First Unitarian Universalist  
Church of Austin  
Austin, TX

Cameron Young, Director of  
Lifespan Religious Education  
Westside Unitarian  
Universalist Church  
Dallas, TX

Denise Garcia  
Unitarian Universalist  
Chelsea, MA

Olivia Pettijohn  
Unitarian Universalist  
Denton, TX

Whit Bodman, Associate  
Professor of Comparative  
Religion at Austin  
Presbyterian Theological  
Seminary  
Congregational Church of  
Austin  
Austin, TX

Hilary Goller Hansell  
DRE Executive Director of  
UBarU  
Unitarian Universalist  
San Antonio, TX

Rev. Jim Rigby, Minister  
St. Andrew's Presbyterian  
Church  
Austin, TX

Tim Anderson, Pastor  
Lutheran Church  
Austin, TX

Rebecca Guengerich, Pastoral Associate Lutheran Campus Ministry, University of Texas Austin, TX	Margaret Sawyer United Church of Christ Ventura, CA
Ranwa Hammamy, Intern Minister Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church Lafayette, CA	Father Les Schmidt, Bishop's Liaison Catholic Committee of the South Big Stone Gap, VA
Retired Pastor Virginia Hathaway United Methodist Church Round Rock, TX	Jamie Schroeder, Bookkeeper First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin Austin, TX
Rev. Dr. Jeff Hood United Methodist Round Rock, TX	Daniel Septimus Texas Hillel Foundation Austin, TX
Nan Jenkins Presbyterian Church (USA) Round Rock, TX	Katrina Shawgo Presbyterian Church (USA) Pflugerville, TX

**Please note: Religious affiliations are for identification purposes only. Those who have signed on do not necessarily represent their entire denomination or faith tradition.**