



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Health ministers' meeting

Federal health and immigration ministers urged to stop deportation of local health care worker

As health ministers across the country gather in Vancouver to discuss health care staffing shortages, the Hospital Employees' Union (HEU) and Sanctuary Health are urging the federal Minister of Health, Jean-Yves Duclos, to intervene and help stop the deportation of a local health care worker.

Claudia Zamorano, a hospital housekeeper and HEU member at Royal Columbian Hospital, is facing deportation along with her family on December 19, even though their permanent residency application on humanitarian and compassionate grounds has yet to be processed by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Zamorano's family, including her 9-year-old daughter, arrived in Canada in 2017, fleeing violence in Mexico. As they waited for the refugee application in Canada to be processed, the family started working and volunteering in their community.

"Like all housekeepers in our health care system, Claudia has been on the front lines of infection control, cleaning and sanitizing hospital rooms to keep other health care workers, patients and members of the community safe from COVID," says Meena Brisard, HEU secretary-business manager. "She has put herself and her family at risk of contracting COVID for three years to help keep Canadians safe."

Sanctuary Health—a migrant justice advocacy group, HEU, and numerous community groups have been urging the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Sean Fraser, for months to approve Zamorano's family's permanent residency application, as they face imminent deportation because their refugee application was denied.

"The federal government prides itself as being compassionate and welcoming of immigrants," says Omar Chu, a member of Sanctuary Health. "And yet, this December, six days before Christmas, we'll be deporting a health care worker, her daughter—who has only ever known the Canadian school system—and their family back to Mexico, where their safety is at risk. It doesn't make any sense."

Advocates have also urged the Minister to apply a broader interpretation of special measures like the now-closed stream for refugee claimants working in health care. The IRCC's narrow application of the program only to workers who provide direct patient care meant that other vital health care workers, including housekeepers like Claudia, were not included in the program.

The deportation contradicts the federal government's recent announcement about significantly boosting immigration levels, to address labour shortages in health care and other sectors.

"Our health care system is facing dire staffing shortages nation-wide," says Brisard. "There are permanent residency applications, like that of Claudia's family, that the immigration minister can approve today to keep another needed health care worker on-the-job. We should be doing everything we can to keep health care workers like Claudia."

The Hospital Employees' Union is B.C.'s largest health care union with more than 50,000 members working across the health care team in hospitals, care homes, community services, First Nation's health organizations, and in the health logistics and supply. Sanctuary Health is a grassroots community group that deploys direct action, movement-building, community-engagement, and direct support strategies to advocate for access to services for all regardless of immigration status or documentation.

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