

Valley residents demonstrate during 'Families Belong Together' event

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Cache

Valley resident Lizette Cruz spent part of her childhood sleeping in a one-bedroom apartment with six members of her family — and roaches.

Then, her 16-year-old mother decided to leave her daughter and go to America for a better life.

"Every night, she would look at the moon and that would be her happiness," said Cruz, holding her 6-month-old during her speech at the Families Belong Together rally in Logan on Saturday. "She would say, 'At least I know Lizette is looking at that same moon. One day, she'll be next to me.'"

Then Cruz made a pledge to members of the crowd, who were standing at the Historic Cache County Courthouse with signs protesting the Trump Administration's immigration policies.

"So I say, today my job is to strengthen families and to protect children," Cruz said. "Whatever it is we have to do, however we have to do it, Cache Valley, we can do it!"

Logan's Families Belong Together rally was just one of many like it staged in cities large and small throughout the United States on Saturday to protest President Donald Trump's immigration policies.

The Logan event was organized by the American Civil Liberties Union — People Power, a “special project” of the ACLU that serves as a watchdog against the Trump Administration’s policies on civil liberties, according to the organization’s Facebook page.

In an interview, Kolby Sorenson, an ACLU People Power volunteer who lives in Smithfield, said when a community member inquired if a local demonstration would be held Saturday, his organization agreed to do it.

“I think the residents of Cache Valley, regardless of political affiliation, agree, for the most part, that the family separation policy was a cruel and inhumane policy,” Sorenson said.

He was referring to the Trump Administration’s “zero tolerance” policy, instituted in April, which called on federal prosecutors to step up prosecution of immigrants entering the United States illegally. In a news release announcing the policy, Attorney General Jeff Sessions said such action is needed because “a crisis has erupted” at the southwest border with illegal crossings.

Since the policy’s implementation, thousands of immigrant parents trying to cross the border are facing criminal proceedings and separation from their children. When audio of the youth detained at border facilities pleading for family members surfaced earlier this month, activists demanded the White House reverse policy and reunite families.

Melanie M. Domenech Rodríguez, USU psychology professor, spoke at the Logan demonstration on Saturday about the trauma these border facility conditions can cause children.

“Decades of psychological research show that children separated from their parents can suffer severe psychological distress,” she said. “The longer the parents and the child are separated, the greater the child’s symptoms of anxiety and depression. ... There are 2,300 children that have been separated from their parents and as far as I’m concerned, the clock has been ticking.”

Trump signed an executive order providing at least a temporary stop to immigrant families being separated, but only in instances where the parents are not deemed a harm to their children. Soon after, a judge ordered those immigrant families back together, but the Justice Department is disputing aspects of the ruling.

“Public pressure is what drove these changes,” Sorenson told attendees on Saturday.

The ACLU — People Power volunteer even said he wasn’t sure if those “recent victories” would make for good reason for people to turn out to the historic courthouse on Saturday.

“But you guys showed up in a big way,” Sorenson said.

Not only did roughly 200 attendees show up to listen to speakers, they marched up and down Logan downtown as well. Holding signs with messages like, “Kids Need Hugs” and “Reunite Families — We Must Be Better Than This,” the demonstrators chanted “Love, not hate, makes America great!”

John Ferguson, a Utah State University professor and representative of ACLU of Utah, told attendees how the civil liberties organization has helped bring immigrant families in the Beehive State together.

“Whatever promise they (the Trump Administration) make, I can make you a promise: The ACLU, we will not stop fighting until this harmful policy is reversed permanently,” Ferguson said. “We will not sit down until every family is reunited.”

He also asked attendees of the Logan Families Belong Together demonstration to make him a promise.

“You will continue to stand against these kind of indefensible policies,” Ferguson said. “That you will continue to have your voices heard, that you will not let this slip away.”

Ferguson said promises aren’t worth a whole lot if there’s no action behind them.

"If all we do is show up today and we feel good and we go home, I don't know if we've done all that we can do," he said. "The biggest, the most effective ... thing we can do on this issue, we're going to do in November. What are we going to do in November?"

The crowd responded — three times — "vote!"

"That's great, because remember, elections are not run by the people that all the population wants," Ferguson said. "They're run by the people that show up. We have to show up."

