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**“DEFENDING DEMOCRACY” COMMUNITY IMMIGRATION HEARINGS
TO COUNTER BIASED HOUSE IMMIGRATION HEARINGS**

What: *Defending Democracy*, A Community Immigration Hearing
When: Wednesday August 16th, 2006 (6 PM, food and music; 7-9 PM, hearing)
Where: St. Luke’s Community Center, 3333 Squalicum Parkway, Bellingham, WA

Bellingham, Washington (August 4, 2006)—Deeply disappointed by the biased approach taken by the U.S. House of Representatives in its immigration and border enforcement hearings, a coalition of concerned Washington state community groups will hold a series of community immigration hearings entitled *Defending Democracy: Strengthening Communities for Justice*. The first such forum, to be held along the northern U.S. border in Bellingham, will specially address the question of “*What Are the Challenges and Threats of Eroding Human Rights and Civil Liberties In the Name of Immigration Reform?*” The Washington hearings are part of a series of counter-hearings being conducted as part of the Liberty and Justice for All campaign, a national, cross-sectoral coalition of human rights, civil liberties, civil rights, and immigrant rights groups working to end draconian provisions that deeply erode civil liberties and human rights in both the House and Senate immigration bills.

“These *Defending Democracy* immigration hearings will be in stark contrast to the sham House hearings, which have been marked by exclusion of diverse voices, bias towards enforcement, and disregard for the rights of those most directly affected by government policies,” said Rosalinda Guillen, Executive Director of Community to Community, a grassroots group based in Bellingham. Pramila Jayapal, Executive Director of Hate Free Zone Washington and the Regional Coordinator for the Liberty and Justice for All campaign, added, “Real people from diverse communities will testify about the devastating effects on their own lives, highlighting the enormous erosions of rights and liberties that are taking place in America in the name of immigration reform.”

The *Defending Democracy* forum in Bellingham will feature testimony from a variety of local and regional community members discussing the need for real comprehensive immigration reform and erosions of human rights and civil liberties, as well as a blue-ribbon panel of commissioners. Confirmed commissioners include Washington State Human Rights Commission executive director Marc Brenman, community leaders Larry Estrada and Vernon Damani Johnson, and Bellingham City Council member Barbara Ryan. The *Defending Democracy* series will continue with a community forum in the Puget Sound area in September, and another in Eastern Washington in October.

The House hearings, taking place across the country, are intended to shore up support for an unworkable, enforcement-heavy approach to immigration policy. In Washington state, the Committee on Homeland Security will conduct a field hearing in Bellingham on Tuesday, August 8th, 2006, at 1:00 p.m. at the Bellingham City Council Chamber (210 Lottie Street, Bellingham). In addition to attending the *Defending Democracy* immigration hearings, community members are encouraged to attend the House hearing to present alternative viewpoints.

Co-sponsors of the *Defending Democracy* series include Rights Working Group; American Civil Liberties Union (WA); American Immigration Lawyers’ Association (WA); CASA Latina; Community to Community; Church Council of Greater Seattle; Hate Free Zone Washington; Lutheran Public Policy Office; Minority Executive Directors’ Coalition; Northwest Immigrant Rights Project; SEIU 775; Tenants’ Union of Washington; UNITE HERE Local 8; Washington State Democratic Party; Whatcom County Democrats; Whatcom Peace and Justice Center; and others.

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