

Contra Costa fast-tracks \$1 million legal-aid program for county's unauthorized residents



Members of the Contra Costa Immigrant Rights Alliance hugged and celebrated after the board unanimously voted to help fund Stand Together CoCo. Photo credit: Cecilia Lei.

By [Cecilia Lei](#) Posted 1 hour ago

After months of organizing by activists, the Contra Costa board of supervisors voted unanimously last week to help fund Stand Together CoCo, establishing the first rapid-response legal aid program for its estimated 65,000 unauthorized immigrants.

Following a nearly two-hour discussion on Tuesday, highlighted by impassioned speeches from community residents and local organizations on the urgency to protect local immigrants, the board agreed to pay for six months of the initiative.

“In this era where there is so much bashing of immigrants and hard-working families who live in this country, it is important to stand up, and to be protective and recognize the value that these families have,” said Supervisor John Gioia during the meeting.

The program provides legal, educational and rapid-response services to immigrants, including know-your-rights workshops, informational presentations to Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainees, and free legal representation during immigration proceedings.

With the future of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, unknown, Supervisor Federal Glover said it was necessary for governments to protect the unauthorized population.

The \$1 million program, which goes into effect on January 2, already raised more than \$500,000 in matching grants from private foundations, such as the Richmond Community Foundation and the California Endowment. The money was corralled by the Contra Costa Immigrant Rights Alliance (CCIRA). The program will be evaluated next April, before the county decides to commit another \$500,000 for the next fiscal.

Stand Together was spearheaded by public defender Ali Saidi and other CCIRA coalition members. Before the vote, the group rallied outside, holding colorful signs that read “Due Process For All!” and “Don’t Separate Families.” Activists formed a circle while highlighting the need for the program, since the county did not have these resources for immigrants.

The group was confident before the vote. Saidi, described as “relentless” by county public defender Robin Lipetzky, said he felt good about Stand Together’s chances.

“It’s the right thing to do,” Saidi said.

All the supervisors agreed that deporting young immigrants and separating families was unconscionable. “The folks that we’re talking about are my neighbors, our friends, my kids’ classmates,” said Supervisor Diane Burgis. “As the mom of three boys, I can’t imagine how hard it is for a family to face deportation proceedings.”

During the meeting, Supervisor Karen Mitchoff also placed a resolution on the agenda to reaffirm the county’s support for DACA, which passed unanimously.

Supervisor Candace Andersen was the only hesitant official. She cited safety concerns, notably the potential for rapid responders to spark public protests and frenzy. But she ultimately was a vote in favor. “I’m going to take a leap of faith,” she said at the end of the meeting.

“It is very important in our community that we provide protection for everybody.”