



MONROE COUNTY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ONE BOOK, ONE COMMUNITY OF MONROE COUNTY
PANEL DISCUSSION ON IMMIGRATION REFORM
SET FOR APRIL 1

Reyna Grande, Immigration Memoir Author, to Visit MCCC Wednesday

MONROE, Mich. – Families are torn apart, businesses lose workers and some of the best young minds in the world leave the U.S. for other countries.

Monroe County residents will get a glimpse into these and other issues surrounding immigration reform, one of the hottest topics facing Congress as mid-term elections approach.

A panel discussion, “Immigration Reform, A Family Issue,” will be presented at 7 p.m. on April 1 at Monroe County Community College.

The panel is part of the One Book, One Community project, which this year features “The Distance Between Us,” a memoir by Reyna Grande about the trauma that families suffer when they are split up by immigration to the U.S. Grande will visit the college for a free “Meet the Author” event Wednesday at 7 p.m. in the La-Z-Boy Center. She will elaborate on the “The Distance Between Us, and a book signing will follow.

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Panel members for the April 1 panel discussion, which is free and open to the public, will range from a leading legal authority on the subject to an activist who works with immigrant families and the supervisor of Monroe County's immigration detention facility.

"A community is composed of families the way a house is built from bricks," said Diego Bonesatti, of Michigan United, who will serve as a panel member. "You can't keep a house standing if its bricks are broken, and our communities suffer the same way when families are separated.

"The immigration system is separating families or keeping families separated and that, foremost among many reasons, is why we need immigration reform."

In "The Distance Between Us," Grande tells the story of her life, beginning as a 5-year-old growing up in a poor Mexican community not far from Acapulco.

Her father left the family to find a new life in the U.S., and didn't return for eight years. Then she was split from her mother when she crossed the border with her father.

Her story gives personal testimony to how families are torn apart by our current immigration policies. Efforts to reform U.S. immigration laws are caught up in the stalemate between the Democrat-controlled Senate and the Republican-controlled House.

"Our current broken system separates parents from their children, employers from their hard workers, and costs America billions of dollars in lost wages, unpaid taxes, and the expense of detaining and deporting hundreds of thousands of people each year," said David Koelsch, a lawyer on the panel.

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Koelsch points out that most people, both liberal and conservative, agree that we need to stem the flow of bright young minds who study in our universities and then are sent away because our immigration policies don't allow them to stay in the U.S.

“Immigration reform is needed to allow the U.S. to compete for the best and brightest global talent. Right now, we are getting beat by Canada and Europe in the race for that global talent,” he said.

One of the sticking points is what to do with the 11 million undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S. Legislation that would create a pathway to citizenship was approved by the Senate last June, but House leaders haven't acted on the bill.

Meanwhile, record numbers of immigrants are being deported each year, often breaking up families. An estimated 400,000 people were deported in 2012 – a record high for the nation – and if deportation rates continue at the current pace, roughly 2 million people will have been deported by the end of 2014 under the Obama administration.

Within the last few weeks, President Barack Obama asked the Department of Homeland Security to consider finding more humane ways to conduct immigration enforcement.

The panel discussion is sponsored by The Agora, the student newspaper at MCCC. Julia Wells, editor of the Agora and a sophomore at MCCC, will moderate the panel.

Panel members include:

David Koelsch is director of the Immigration Law Clinic and the Asylum Law Clinic at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law. The Immigration Law Clinic represents immigrants on a variety of legal issues, including abandoned immigrant children and abused immigrant women.

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He also teaches U.S. Immigration Law and a comparative U.S.-Canada Immigration Law course, as well as a seminar on Spirituality and the Law. He recently was named Outstanding Immigration Law Professor by the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

Diego Bonesatti is director of Legal Services for Michigan United, where his work includes running the legal services program and recruiting and training volunteers to provide immigration services, such as assistance with the naturalization process. He also advocates for community leaders in removal or detention situations and works to support immigration reform.

A graduate of Michigan State University, Bonesatti's parents emigrated from Argentina. Before returning to Michigan, he worked for many of Illinois' top immigration non-profits, including the National Immigrant Justice Center, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant & Refugee Rights and the West Suburban Action Project, or "PASO" by its acronym in Spanish.

Major Troy Goodnough is head of Jail Operations for the Monroe County Sheriff's Office. Goodnough directs the county jail, as well as the Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facility, which houses roughly 1,200 detainees a year – many on their way to deportation.

Goodnough, a former MCCC student and Monroe High School graduate, has a bachelor's degree from Spring Arbor University and a variety of certifications in law enforcement and corrections. He's also been chairman of the Monroe County Safety & Traffic Committee, the Raisinville Township Planning Commission and the Monroe County Ambulance Authority.

Members of the Monroe County Hispanic community also have been asked to participate on the panel.

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