

For Immediate Release

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## **Local Groups Launch *805 Undocufund* to Provide Relief for Immigrants Excluded from Federal Disaster Aid Programs**

***Many undocumented immigrants lost homes, jobs, wages, belongings, but excluded from FEMA and Disaster Unemployment Assistance, community steps in to provide assistance with private donations***

In the aftermath of the devastating Thomas Fire that struck Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties, local immigrant organizations are launching an “805 Undocufund” to provide relief to local residents who are excluded from federally-funded assistance programs due to their immigration status.

With farmworker housing and several apartment complexes destroyed or damaged, wildfire smoke making outdoor work like farm labor and landscaping hazardous, loss of homes where many immigrants provide childcare or housekeeping, and ongoing severed freeway access cutting many off from service sector jobs in Montecito and Santa Barbara, the local immigrant community has been heavily economically impacted by the wildfire. However, undocumented immigrants are excluded from federal programs such as Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) aid and Disaster Unemployment Assistance. Immigrant families face other barriers to seeking assistance including lack of familiarity with official institutions, fear of government agencies, and limited English proficiency.

“I lost my job in Montecito due to the disaster,” said Carlos, an undocumented resident of Goleta. “First the city was evacuated due to the fire, and now the mudslide. I’ve been out of a job for three weeks - there’s no jobs out there. Although we do not live in Montecito, we have also have been affected by the natural disaster. We have three kids, rent an apartment and we have to pay for insurance, and other bills; and at this time, we don’t have income to pay for these bills. We are thankful for any assistance in maintaining our household during this difficult time.”

After the Tubbs Fire in Northern California, community organizations created an Undocufund which has assisted over 1,000 local immigrant families. The “805 Undocufund” is based on that successful model, partnering local donors and foundations with organizations known and trusted within the immigrant community. Immigrant-serving organizations in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties including MICOP, CAUSE, and FLA are leading the effort, with support being provided by the McCune Foundation and funds being managed by the Ventura County Community Foundation.

“As our community picks up the pieces from this disaster thanks to government assistance and homeowners insurance, we need to remember the thousands of local immigrant families who have been economically impacted and are struggling to make ends meet without help,” said Maricela Morales, Executive Director of

CAUSE. “We’re proud to launch the 805 Undocufund and truly appreciate the incredible support coming from our community.”

“The 805 UndocuFund seeks to provide a safety net for our undocumented community at a time when the federal government does not recognize their financial hardship due to immigration status,” said Eder Gaona-Macedo, Executive Director of Future Leaders of America (FLA). “Undocumented workers have long been the backbone of our local economy by forming a large part of the service sector in Santa Barbara and Ventura County. It’s time for our community to pull resources and provide solidarity to our most disenfranchised community members. FLA is proud to work with the UndocuFund and ensure that the livelihoods of our families are not further exacerbated by this natural disaster.”

“The Thomas Fire and Montecito Mudslides have highlighted and exacerbated systemic issues that have always affected the Central Coast’s undocumented indigenous immigrant community, said Genevieve Flores-Haro, Deputy Director of the Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP). “We at MICOP are proud to work with our partner organizations to launch the 805 UndocuFund and ask that you join us in giving our “granito of arena” (little grain of sand), that will provide much needed relief and hope to our undocumented families impacted by these two natural disasters.”

The 805 Undocufund received a major initial boost from Santa Barbara-based international aid organization Direct Relief, which contributed \$100,000 to the effort.

"Direct Relief extends its deepest sympathy to those in our community who have suffered losses to the Thomas Fire and tragic mudslides," said Direct Relief President and CEO Thomas Tighe. "Direct Relief is joining with CAUSE and pledging its support for the 805 Undocufund with an understanding that disasters often weigh heaviest on the most vulnerable among us, as well as a commitment to doing whatever it takes to help our community avoid an even deeper setback."

Tax-deductible donations can be made by check to the Ventura County Community Foundation with “805 Undocufund” written in the memo, or made online at [vccf.org](http://vccf.org) with “805 Undocufund” written in the “Fund Name” field. More information on the Undocufund is available at [805undocufund.org](http://805undocufund.org).