Member, Board of Supervisors
District 9

City and County of San Francisco

DAVID CAMPOS

July 10, 2012

Honorable Kevin de León
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 5108
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for the Reuniting Immigrant Families Act (SB 1064-De León)

Dear Senator De León:

I write in strong support of Senate Bill 1064, which will eliminate family reunification barriers in the child welfare system for immigrant families that have been divided by deportation.

In California, the mass deportation of immigrants due to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) "Secure Communities" (S-Comm) program, a controversial local law enforcement-ICE fingerprint-sharing program, has reached an alarming peak. Since the first implementation of S-Comm in California in June of 2009, local law enforcement agencies have assisted ICE in the deportation of more than 75,000 residents of California, the vast majority who have been categorized by ICE as either "non-criminals" or lower level offenders.

As they are detained and deported without warning, many of these immigrants are forced to leave behind their children, who are very often U.S. citizens. Currently there are at least 5,100 children nationwide in the child welfare system because their parents are under immigration custody or have been deported. This number is expected to rise to 15,000 in the next five years. Many of them will never have a realistic opportunity to be reunified with their parents because parents in immigration detainment are frequently unable to access services and meet requirements set out by dependency courts to regain custody of their children. This is further complicated by a parent's deportation because of the difficulty in making arrangements in the country of origin. Though immigrant relatives may be willing to take custody of a child when a parent is in this situation, they are turned down by the child welfare system because of their immigration status. As a result, children can be permanently separated from their families.

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As an immigrant who was born in Guatemala and brought to this country as a child by my parents, I know first-hand how important parents and close family members are for the wellbeing and guidance of children in immigrant communities. By providing all immigrant family members, regardless of their status, the ability to take custody of a child left behind in the deportation process, this bill will give these children stability and continuity in a time of great uncertainty.

California needs SB-1064 to make sure that parents are given a reasonable opportunity to fulfill their family reunification plan and so that immigrant relative placements become a viable option.

By extending the family reunification hearing period for deportees, establishing working agreements between municipalities and foreign consulates around child custody cases, providing guidance to social workers on referring children eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, and allowing for foreign forms of identification to be used by immigrant family members for custody purposes, this bill is an important step in the right direction to ensure that families stay together and that children get to grow up in loving and stable homes.

Thus, I respectfully urge passage of SB 1064.

Sincerely,

David Campos