

For Hawaii residents seeking US citizenship, national immigration debate a concern

<https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2019/03/31/local-union-helps-legal-permanent-residents-become-us-citizens/>

By **Casey Lund** | March 31, 2019

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - As the immigration debate heats up on the national stage, immigrants in Hawaii are speaking out about the current climate.

Many of them are working to become legal U.S. citizens.

On Saturday morning, around 60 legal permanent residents started the long and difficult road to citizenship.

It's a daunting, paperwork-filled task that can take years. But they will have help and some of it is coming from people who have walked in their shoes.

"Lately, it's been scary here because of the news," said Glesie Enriquez as she waited in line at a citizenship workshop at Harris United Methodist Church. "I feel excited and nervous at the same time because this is the first time I'm going to apply for citizenship."

Enriquez came to Honolulu from the Philippines in 2011 and dedicated eight years of service to the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

"What I thought is if I'm a citizen here, a U.S. citizen, I will feel much safer," said Enriquez.



Photo Credit: UniteHere/Local5

The workshop is being hosted by volunteers with the Unite HERE Local Five Union along with their community partners like the Legal Clinic and The Pacific Gateway Center.

"We estimate that Hawaii has around 55,000 legal permanent residents. So, the need is definitely there," said Unite Here Local Five Spokesperson Paola Rodelas who is an immigrant herself and at one point, was here illegally. "Growing up, my biggest fear wasn't monsters under my bed it was that I.C.E. was going to come in and split my family apart."

Rodelas has been through the process that begins with Saturday's first step: a 20 page application. Then, in 6-8 months (if you're lucky) an interview including a civics and english test. At the end of it all she says it was well worth it.

"I finally became a U.S. citizen when I was 16 years old and all of those fears just finally went out the window and I didn't have to worry about that anymore," said Rodelas.

On that personal level, she's motivated to help people like Glesie Enriquez to achieve the same goal.

"I'm so thankful to everyone that helped me fill out the form. I'm so excited for them and for me too and I hope I will pass," said Enriquez.

This is the second Citizenship workshop Unite Here Local 5 union has hosted. Last year, they helped more than 100 people start their path to becoming U.S. citizens. They do intend to have more workshops in the future and say they are open to the public not just their union members.



Photo Credit: UniteHere/Local5

Copyright 2019 Hawaii News Now. All rights reserved.