

EMILY's List New Immigrant Initiative Reflects a Changing America

By: Cassie Castro November 15, 2018

EMILY's List, an organization dedicated to electing more progressive, pro-choice women to office at the local, state, and national level, has announced a new initiative in anticipation of the 2020 presidential election. This initiative will focus on getting more immigrant women to run and get elected to political office.

In a political environment in which immigration is one of our country's most divisive issues, EMILY's List is taking a bold stance on the nation's changing immigration policies. Their message is clear: Immigrants, particularly women immigrants, are fundamental to American society.

So why is this important?

"Immigrant women are one of our country's most vulnerable groups. They need candidates who will defend them at every political level and defend the values that this country was built on," said Stephanie Schriok, president of EMILY's List. "EMILY's List is prepared to give these candidates the support that they need to win in 2020 and change the conversation surrounding immigrants in the United States."

There are just twelve foreign-born members of Congress, and only five of those members are women. They are Senator Mazi Hirono from Japan (D-HI), Rep. Pramila Jayapal from India (D-WA), Rep. Stephanie Murphy from Vietnam (D-FL), Rep. Lleana Ros-Lehtinen from Cuba (R-FL) and Rep. Norma Torres from Guatemala (D-CA).

In addition to being one of the most vulnerable groups in society, immigrant women are drastically underrepresented in Congress. Immigrant women represent over 51 percent of the

overall foreign-born population and there are over 21 million immigrant women living in the United States. This means that less than 1 percent of Congress is made up of immigrant women.

The way our immigration system is structured makes immigrant women one of the most disadvantaged groups in American society. Due to their immigration status and institutional language barriers, many immigrant women find themselves in a position where they are forced to remain in an abusive relationship because they can't communicate with law enforcement or they are dependent on their abuser for their immigration status or the status of their children. They are also disproportionately affected by policies like family separation.

With key women's rights legislation on the table such as the renewal of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), it's essential that we have representatives who will prioritize this legislation, not just for women, but specifically for those who are the most at-risk in our communities.

This EMILY's List initiative to elect more progressive immigrant women to office isn't just a matter of representation - it's a matter of ensuring the safety of so many marginalized groups in this country.

This isn't the first step that EMILY's List has taken to benefit the immigrant community in the United States.

In March of 2016, in anticipation of the 2016 presidential election, EMILY's List rolled out an initiative to get more Latinas elected to office. This initiative included the formation of a Latina Advisory Council, a group of nine influential Latina leaders around the country including civil rights leader Dolores Huerta and executive director of the Center for American Progress, Angela Kelley. As Latinx people represent a large portion of the immigrant population, it's forward-thinking initiatives like this that will help in creating a more inclusive and representative Congress.

The record number of women and women of color elected across the country in the 2018 midterms showed us that America is ready for progress and America is ready for change. Organizations like EMILY's List will be on the frontlines of this fight, ensuring that our elected representatives are actually representative of the American people and the values we hold close.