



Members of the October 11th No-Match delegation, in front of the Social Security Administration in Baltimore.

## Saying No to No-Match

### IWJ and Other Worker Rights Leaders Fight Anti-Immigrant and Anti-Worker Rule

More than 100 faith, labor and community leaders gathered on October 11th at St. Gabriel's Catholic Church in Baltimore to bring attention to a potentially devastating government rule that threatens the jobs of millions of workers. Their concern: proposed changes to Social Security Administration (SSA) no-match letters, which notify employers of discrepancies in a worker's Social Security record.

At the Baltimore event, Tom Hucker, a member of the Maryland House of Delegates, and Maria Welch, President of the Baltimore Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, stressed that the SSA no-match system is flawed and slow. Seventy percent of the errors are related to U.S. citizens and legal residents, and resolving the mistakes can take as long as six months.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has proposed changes to SSA no-match letters that will require employers to resolve mismatched SSA records within 90 days of an employee receiving a letter. If they do not do so, employers must fire the employee or face stiff penalties.

This blatant abuse by the DHS of the Social Security system threatens the jobs of 8 million workers. Furthermore, unscrupulous employers could use the letters as a pretense to fire workers who are involved in a union organizing campaign or who are otherwise unwanted. Some may simply fire those who "appear" foreign, assuming they are undocumented.

For almost an hour, those gathered heard testimony from labor and community leaders, affected workers, and representatives from the religious community. The message

from religious leaders was clear: the proposed change is unjust and it provides yet one more example of the need for comprehensive immigration reform.

Susan Leslie, Director of Congregational Advocacy and Witness for the Unitarian Universalist Association (and an IWJ board member), denounced the ways in which the proposed changes threaten the inherent worth and dignity of every person and the possibility of a community of peace where all people experience justice. Corey Saylor, Government Relations Director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), asserted the need to have a national immigration policy that starts with recognizing and treating every person as a human being.

The final word and call to action was delivered by IWJ board member Rev. Jarvis Johnson, who spoke impassionedly about the crucial task of bridge-building across the so-called "brown-black" divide between the Hispanic and African-American communities. An SSA no-match letter recipient himself, Rev. Johnson invited all religious leaders present to join him in delivering a letter to the office of SSA Commissioner Michael Astrue. A delegation of 14 religious leaders joined Rev. Johnson in delivering the letter, which asked for an immediate stop to the issuing of no-match letters.

On December 5th, Jobs with Justice (JwJ) and the Low Wage Immigrant Worker Coalition (LWIW) held a Workers' Rights Board hearing at the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington D.C. to explore the impact of no-match letters.

Approximately 200 people gathered to hear workers, advocates, and labor leaders describe the devastating impact of the new no-match regulations. (IWJ is one of eight co-convenors of the LWIW). Witold Skwierczynski, President of the American Federation of Government Employees local that represents Social Security workers, blasted the new regs, saying that they perverted the mission of Social Security workers, which is to help retirees and the disabled get the benefits to which they are entitled. Three of the Worker Rights board members hearing testimony were IWJ board members Rev. Nelson Johnson of the Beloved Community Center in Greensboro North Carolina; Edie Russell of the United Church of Christ; and Thom Shellabarger of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Interfaith Worker Justice is appalled at the failure of Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform, leaving the U.S. without a national immigration policy. As a network of people of faith, IWJ understands the nature of this historical juncture. This is a time of risk filled with opportunity, especially for the religious community whose moral voice can change the terms of the debate. People of faith have before them perhaps the greatest challenge of this movement for justice: to change the hearts and minds of Americans concerning immigration and immigrant workers, to end the hurtful and myopic nature of the national policy debate, and to lift its collective voice in defense of those made vulnerable and marginalized by society's structures.