

Youths trek from Miami to Washington for immigrant rights

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Body

MIAMI While their fellow college students recovered from the night's revelry, four South Floridians celebrated the New Year with a more active and activist approach.

The group set out Friday to begin a 1,500 mile journey they are calling the "Trail of Dreams," from **Miami**'s historic Freedom Tower to **Washington**, D.C.

The goal is to raise support for legislation that would include a path to citizenship for eligible illegal **immigrants**.

The four, all **immigrants** themselves, plan to walk the entire distance, no matter the weather.

They expect students and other supporters to join them along the way and plan to arrive in the capital May 1, which has become a day of **immigrant rights** rallies in recent years.

All are top students at local colleges and campus leaders.

Some are now here legally, some are not.

All say they are willing to take the risks that come with bringing attention to the plight of students who, like themselves, were brought to the U.S. as children and are now here illegally.

"I'm tired of coming back to school each semester and hearing about another friend who was picked up and deported," Juan Rodriguez told a group of supporters during a recent gathering.

Rodriguez, president of the student government at **Miami** Dade College's InterAmerican Campus, and the others say they were inspired by the migrant farmworkers who walked the length of California in the 1970s, and by the civil **rights** marches of the 1960s.

On a recent December morning, the group led a practice walk under pelting rain from downtown to a church in **Miami**'s Little Haiti neighborhood. Also in attendance was a group of **immigrants** from the farm community of Homestead, south of **Miami**, which plans to begin a fast Jan. 1 to bring attention to immigration reform.

They, like Rodriguez, believe writing letters and calling politicians is not enough. Rodriguez noted that U.S. Rep. Luis Gutierrez, D-Ill., recently introduced an immigration bill in Congress but that such bills have been introduced many times before.

He and the others want comprehensive immigration reform, meaning a path to citizenship for qualified **immigrants** here illegally as well as improvements in border security that respect **immigrant** communities.

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They are also calling on President Barack Obama to halt the routine detention and deportation of illegal **immigrants** who have children and spouses who are U.S. citizens.

And they want him to halt the deportation of **youths** brought to the U.S. as children, who are now here illegally but want to attend college or enter the military in exchange for the chance of a green card through a so-called "Dream Act."

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