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LBAW CONDEMNS THE BELLINGHAM, WA ICE RAID AND ADVOCATES FOR CONGRESS TO PASS COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM IN 2009

SEATTLE, WA. The Latina/o Bar Association of Washington (LBAW) is disturbed by the recent U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid in Bellingham, WA. The LBAW wishes to shed light and advocates about systematic abuses that bear upon the Washington Latino community. Such abuse is evident in the manner of how over 25 Latino employees were seized and detained by ICE officers on February 24, 2009 while working at Yamato Engine Specialists Ltd. LBAW condemns this practice as displacing families and businesses, and creating a ripple of fear through Latino communities in our state.

LBAW President Nicole McGrath noted the effect of such raids: "It only creates more harm than good by scaring local Latino families who, in turn, react by keeping their children home from school and cease reporting crimes in their neighborhoods." Such practices also evidence a disproportional effect on Latinos detained in the raids in Washington State, and should not be a trend towards practices seen in other states such as Arizona.

"Educated, professional Latinos continue to feel frustration and singled out, as a community, when ICE raids substantially target Latinos. Whether a Latino lawyer or skilled mechanic, Washington has always been a more tolerant, open community than a state such as Arizona, and the Latino legal community will not support practices that divide families," continued LBAW President McGrath, "immigrants, both legal and undocumented, positively contribute to the economy and the culture of Washington and our nation. It is imperative that we, as Latino lawyers, continue to show solidarity with immigrants in our community."

Despite the national debate, immigrants continue to work hard and make a meaningful contribution to our economy. To that end, LBAW supports the announced investigation into the Bellingham, WA raid by Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano.