

**NINA MOINI:** It's been nearly six months since the Trump administration began its campaign to detain and deport thousands of Minnesotans. As state and city leaders continue to assess and address the full scope of the impact, a local partnership of community organizations is launching an effort to train people on how to collect stories of people's experiences during this time. These trainings are tied to the Truth Council announced by Governor Tim Walz last month. The governor said the aim is to document the impacts of Operation Metro Surge.

We're joined now by Emelia González Avalos. She is the Executive Director of Unidos Minnesota, which is working to provide the trainings in partnership with ISAIHAH and the Advocates for Human Rights. Thanks very much for your time this afternoon, Emelia.

**EMELIA** Good afternoon. Thank you for having me.

**GONZALEZ**

**AVALOS:**

**NINA MOINI:** Governor Walz did announce the creation of this Truth Council in March. Could you explain, ultimately, how your work will contribute to the council? And do you think that that is a good way to go about chronicling what has happened here in an official way?

**EMELIA** Yes. I do believe this is a good next step. We are very aligned with the purpose of creating a formal public record of the experiences of victims and survivors of human rights violations, regardless of immigration or citizenship status. This is also providing immigrant refugees, citizens, journalists, legal observers, and community members a safe forum to testify about their experiences and document the Human Rights violations, including physical, psychological, familial, economic, and harms resulting from the operation.

We see the creation of a comprehensive analysis of violation of local, state, federal, and international law, and eventually, if we have the guardrails, if we have the infrastructure and the institutions in place, seek justice for those that have been harmed or whose rights have been constitutionally violated.

**NINA MOINI:** And can you tell me about what the training is like in this context for the council? Because there could just be a hotline, or people could send in their accounts. But it sounds like you're providing training to make sure that the individuals reporting are also protecting themselves and going about it in a way that's going to be most effective.

**EMELIA** Yes. So the timeline of the Truth Council is historically short. So my understanding is that the first report will be produced sometime in October. And therefore, we need an incredible amount of energy to make sure that as many people and as many witnesses, as many testimonies, can be submitted to the infrastructure that the Advocates of Human Rights is building.

And so in order to do that, we are relying on the lessons that Minnesotans learn from the last 18 months, and most recently, during Operation Metro Surge. And that is that when regular people show up and lead, they build capacity, they can also be vehicles of institutional legitimacy.

They can be vehicles of scale. And they can also support a robust infrastructure that can go and do, in this very short time, something that institutions, like Unidos by ourselves, or any other NGO will take months and months to get done, if it was only with paid staff in a very specific setting through only institutional pathways.

**NINA MOINI:** That's good perspective. Thank you. During the peak of the surge, those few months, we saw the work that constitutional observers were doing to document what was happening was so vital because it was one of the only sources of information about what was happening. A lot of times, there was misinformation, or not any information, or not enough information coming from the federal government. I know it took a lot of work to build up the capacity of the networks that were operating during that time. And Unidos was a major part of that and is. What was going on through your mind during that time in terms of trying to track what was happening, when everything was happening at once?

**EMELIA GONZALEZ AVALOS:** Well, Unidos made some decisions based on our previous experience from 2016. And we were tracking policy that was really showing us that having a large infrastructure, with the amount of money that the Department of National Security was getting, like \$60 billion, represented an incredibly big challenge to regular community organizing.

And so we needed to train as many people in this very common notion that if they have money, they have guns, they have institutions, then we have people. And we have to train as many people as we possibly can. And so people were ready and acted because through the first 11 months of 2025, hundreds and thousands of people had already emotionally rehearsed scenarios of what could happen when ICE showed up.

And then in June, when there was a very strong military presence on a targeted raid with a judicial warrant on Lake Street and Bloomington Avenue, here in the heart of the Latino community in Minneapolis, people put into action things that they have learned in the previous months. And they can also continue to use that experience to teach others from what happened when they were present here in Lake and Bloomington.

And so the power of rehearsing early, of emotionally locating yourself in a situation of danger or possibilities, understanding the emotional investment that takes to be in some of these situations, already provides any regular person with some social emotional tools to be able to be present and grounded and continue on the mission and record and document for the greater good.

And I think that was a bet that Unidos made early and many others followed after. And we're very proud of that decision. But at the end, it was civil society that took the lesson and scaled to unprecedented numbers that the state and the country witnessed at the cusp of January 23, when millions of people showed up to the streets.

**NINA MOINI:** So I see. I hear what you're saying is that you were preparing from the start of this second Trump administration. And you're continuing now to stay prepared. Before I let you go, Emelia, can you tell us about tomorrow's training? How can people get involved in the trainings? And what should they know about it?

**EMELIA GONZALEZ AVALOS:** So everyone-- it does not matter where your place of worship is, what's your zip code. If you have time to show up at the parking lot of Mercado Central tomorrow, Friday, May 1, we welcome you. We might ask you to bring a notebook to make notes or maybe your cell phone device if you want to take photos or record.

We are teaching each other how to bear witness in an effective way so that the stories that the Truth Council is going to process can reach as many people as possible. We will become agents of trust. We will become truth-keepers. And we will be the external vehicle for the Truth Council to be successful. If you had an experience with ICE enforcement, if your family member had an experience with law enforcement, with ICE enforcement, please show up.

This will also not be the only training. We will have more. But tomorrow is the launch. And we are anticipating that by the time the council announces the designations, like who is going to be sitting here-- right now, they're going through the process of looking at the resumes and choosing people. By the time they're done, then a whole bunch of people in civil society will be ready and their sleeves rolled up to submit stories through protected vehicles that advocates of human rights are holding as the infrastructure.

**NINA MOINI:** Emelia, thank you so much for coming on *Minnesota Now* and telling us about your efforts. I really appreciate your time.

**EMELIA** Thank you so much, everyone.

**GONZALEZ**

**AVALOS:**

**NINA MOINI:** That's Emelia González Avalos, Executive Director of Unidos Minnesota.