

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Tuesday, Sept 20, 2022
Contact: Adriana Rivera, 786-340-8006, media@flic.org

Interviews available in Spanish, English, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole

[Link to pictures and video files](#)

[Link to the Facebook Live](#)



At a Rally in Doral today, State Leaders and Community Denounced the DeSantis-Nuñez Administration's Treatment of Migrants Seeking Refuge

Leaders like Karla Hernandez-Mats and other had strong words for the heinous stunt Governor DeSantis pulled last week using asylum seekers as pawns

Miami, FL – Elected officials, Venezuelan leaders, and other immigration advocates came together in Doral, FL, city with the most Venezuelans, to denounce this blatant disregard for human life after learning that two flights full of asylum seekers were sent from Texas to Martha's Vineyard late Wednesday by the now human-trafficking governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis.

The rally was attended by families from across Miami, Venezuelans and others alike. Everyone was outraged at the political inhumane stunt that the DeSantis-Nuñez administration pulled last week, after promising they would not remove asylum seekers. They have peddled these lies as recently as his September [7th press conference \(min. 31:05\)](#) in Miami.

The event was opened with words from Tessa Petit and Andrea Mercado, Executive Directors of the Florida Immigrant Coalition Votes and Florida Rising respectively. Tessa Petit of the Florida Immigrant Coalition Votes stated,

“On September 15 Governor DeSantis sent two flights full of misguided migrants, many of them children, to Martha's Vineyard. They thought they were at the end of a harrowing journey as they tried to escape an authoritarian regime. Instead they found a cruel man who misled and coerced them into getting into planes, with promises they knew they wouldn't keep. This is not who Florida is. We do not use asylum seekers who have taken the time to go through the legal process to come here, and who were processed by border patrol, and mislabel them as “illegal aliens” to

use them as political pawns. We're here to say no more threats, no more misuse of our tax-payer dollars."

Andrea Mercado of Florida Rising said,

"What Ron DeSantis did was despicable. There is no justification. How are you going to deceive and take advantage of people who are seeking political asylum? DeSantis may have tricked these migrants but he will not trick us come November. We will vote Ron DeSantis out and we will keep him from ever reaching the White House!"

Nikki Fried, Florida's Commissioner of Agriculture stated,

"It is unfortunate that I have to stand here today to talk about another inhumane project from Ron DeSantis, using humans as pawns in his political game. Transporting individuals that have crossed country after country, for political asylum and came here to America for freedom and opportunity. He's using them for one purpose, and that's to get to the White House in 2024, instead of focusing on the issues that are happening here on the ground in Florida. It's more expensive to live here, our rent is higher, our property insurance is higher. He's threatening to have an all-out abortion ban here in Florida and weapon open-carry. But instead he's chosen to spend our tax-payer dollars to transport human beings across the country, so he can get on a stage and get a standing ovation. Ron, we do not accept this. I've sent a letter to Merrick Garland for the Department of Justice to come in and investigate what I believe is human trafficking, smuggling, and kidnapping. And if the Florida legislature isn't going to stop these activities, you know who is? The Florida voters. The Florida voters are gonna stop him in November and are gonna send him packing because this is not how you govern or lead a state of 22 million people. One of the most diverse states in the nation. Mark my words: his days as governor of the state of Florida are gonna come to an end. We're gonna make him a one-term governor, and a 0-term president of the United States."

[Commissioner Fried arrived late to the conference but her remarks are on video in the video file at the top of this release.](#)

Liz Alarcon, Venezuelan Leader and Executive Director of Project Pulso stated,

"Today I am standing in the same city that welcomed my family in the late 1990s, when there were barely any Venezuelans in Florida. 20 years later, due to the brutal regimes governing our country, we see today more Venezuelans in Miami than anywhere else outside of Venezuela. This is due to an unprecedented exodus out of Venezuela; this is the biggest refugee crisis in the world outside of countries at war. Over 7 million Venezuelans have fled the country in the last decades. And we are seeing the hypocrisy of a governor who comes into our communities to pander for our votes, but turns his back on us with his actions, receiving our countrymen and women with cruelty and deceit. Our response to this callous duplicity is to receive our people with empathy and compassion; with the Christian and Catholic values that characterize us. We applaud Venezuelans who have stepped up to receive the migrants like Katusca Valiente, who brought them home-made Venezuelan food for these legal asylum seekers. What a contrast!"

Florida State Representative for District 108 in Miami-Dade County, Dotie Joseph said,

“Many of us came from this country, whether from Venezuela, Cuba or Haiti, seeking something simple: freedom. But for some people, freedom is a political talking point, something to play games with when they want your vote. On Hispanic Heritage Month, this Governor has decided to launch this political play. And this ploy is not new. You’ve heard about the Freedom Rides, where Black people and allies locked hands to demand freedom and equality in this country. White supremacist organized reverse Freedom Rides where they loaded vulnerable Black people, lured them with lies, and dropped them off in different states. They do not care about us, and I’m not talking about all Republicans, I’m talking about this faction of extremists who are taking over and trying to commandeer our country. They are subverting democracy. We have a governor that is weaponizing state agencies against immigrants and asylum seekers. Why do we have international refugee laws? Because after WWII, people got together and decided that when people are fleeing their countries and they need someplace to go, we will not turn them away. Governor DeSantis is making a mockery of freedom! Well I have news for you Mr. Governor, we know what freedom means and we know how to fight for freedom, our ancestors knew how to fight for freedom; we don’t just play it on TV. We don’t just put on a top-gun jacket and pretend. Putting my lawyer hat on now: there will be legal consequences. We will be investigating!”

Marleine Bastien, Haitian Leader and Executive Director of the Family Action Network Movement Action stated,

“These actions from Governor DeSantis are revolting. I have been fighting for the rights of due-process for refugees all over the world who choose the legal route to come to the US. I invite Gov DeSantis to learn about the laws of this country. These people came here looking for refuge, the legal way. Can you imagine what they’ve been through? Can you understand the humiliation? As a social worker and advocate who has listened to hundreds and hundreds of these stories for the past 40 years, I’ll tell you I haven’t met one person who wanted to leave their country if not for life-threatening situations. We are enraged, yes, but I invite you to turn your anger into fuel: organize, come out and vote to get him out!”

Adelys Ferro, Venezuelan Leader and Director of the Venezuelan American Caucus said,

“Many of the people behind these video cameras filming us today, many of those behind me, many of those who live in the buildings all around us, are immigrants; many are political asylees, and another many have the protection of TPS, awarded to us (Venezuelans) last year by President Biden. Many of them still don’t have work permits, many haven’t had a resolution on their cases, and that means many are in a legal limbo when it comes to immigration status. Folks are asking today, ‘Does that mean that we, too, are vulnerable? Will we be put on planes too and taken away from the communities where we have found stability and peace?’ We fled harsh communist regimes where the country’s leaders would manipulate and use us to their benefit, and now we are in the hands of a wannabe authoritarian who mirrors those strongmen in our countries. Governor DeSantis doesn’t care about Floridians, he doesn’t care about immigrants, he doesn’t care about women, he doesn’t care about veterans, he doesn’t care about seniors; he is using our taxes, our money, to traffic our brothers and sisters just to make his political point. I implore my Venezuelan-Americans to look in their hearts and vote for those who really support us.”

Sebastian Caicedo, Colombian Leader with Florida Rising explained,

“I am here as one more immigrant who is feeling great pain today. This governor doesn’t like us and he doesn’t represent us. He used tax-payer dollars to traffic victims of a brutal dictatorship. Today it’s Venezuelans, tomorrow it could be us, and we cannot allow this to happen. On November 8th, this man needs to cease his time in power.”

Ana Sofia Pelaez, Cuban Leader and Director of the Miami Freedom Project stated,

“I am not an immigrant, I was born in the US but my family came here from Cuba in the 1960s seeking the same refuge that was denied to the families that were cruelly manipulated, trafficked and delivered to Martha’s Vineyard. The people that welcomed them there, embody the same values that the people who welcomed my family when they arrived. Our governor should be grateful for all the contributions immigrants have made to this state. And in this city, we are surrounded by the growth and development created by immigrants. Last month, Lieutenant Governor Nuñez came clean about their plans to traffic migrants out of the state and she tried to backtrack those comments, but these comments are now actions. Actions that we will hold this administration accountable for come November.”

Karla Hernandez-Mats, President of the United Teachers of Dade stated,

“Look at the people who are standing behind me. They understand what it’s like to fight for freedom and for the rights of all human beings. I am a daughter of immigrants. These are folks who were seeking refuge from Venezuela. The fact that Governor DeSantis thinks it’s ok to spend \$12 million of our tax dollars for this stunt is shameful; it is not the sign of a leader, it is the sign of a coward! A coward who doesn’t want to take into account the real issues facing Floridians. We are tired of the culture wars.

There’s a word for what he did, it’s called human trafficking. When they come for one, they come for us all. What he did is cruel and inhumane because he is cruel and inhumane.”

Yareliz Mendez-Zamora, Nicaraguan Leader and Federal Campaign Lead said,

“Last Wednesday evening we were stunned when we learned along with everyone else that the DeSantis-Nuñez administration had shipped Venezuelan migrants to Martha’s Vineyard, in a cruel political game as he sets his eyes on the White House. Using \$12 million federally designated funds to help Floridians deal with COVID, he trafficked men, women and small children to an unfamiliar place. He didn’t even alert the local authorities, but had time to alert Fox News. And now there is media trying to both-sides this. There aren’t two sides to this, this is wrong. The migrants were legally seeking asylum as stated by American and international law. As a daughter of Nicaraguan immigrants, I know how politicians exploit people’s political trauma for personal gain and it’s sick! Ron DeSantis, you are repulsive!”

###