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## Rep. Andy Vargas, Local Civic Groups Petition ICE to Keep Haverhill Resident in U.S.

Jacob Leonce, his wife Georgia and their two sons have spent more than 10 years as Haverhill residents, and a handful of local and state advocates are fighting to keep it that way.

St. Lucia native Leonce settled in Haverhill with his family, enrolled his sons in city schools and put down roots at the New England Pentecostal Church more than a decade ago, only to find himself at risk to losing everything earlier this week.

Though Leonce does not have a criminal record, he has been on the radar of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement since a 2010 parking violation in Plaistow, N.H. He had been allowed to remain in the country when Homeland Security used its discretion not to prosecute.

On Monday, the department reversed itself and ordered him to voluntarily depart the U.S. on or before Feb. 8.

Speaking to WHAV Tuesday, Leonce was shaken up over the ruling, but vowed to not lose hope.

"I feel totally betrayed by the law. I came in this country on a visa and did everything I possibly could to maintain my status of being here," Leonce told WHAV. "But we're still fighting and I still believe there is hope. I know God has the final say."

With help from city attorneys Paul A. Magliocchetti and Thomas Tretter, Leonce was able to receive a work permit in 2014 and remain in the U.S. without being considered an "enforcement priority."

The 45-year-old, who is employed as a landscaper, is the sole breadwinner for his family.

Magliocchetti tells WHAV Leonce does not deserve to be targeted.

"The sad part about this is he has two kids under the age of 10. They live here in Haverhill and attend Haverhill Public Schools. They're a churchgoing family and he's always worked, never been a ward of the state," Magliocchetti said. "He pays his taxes every single year. He's done everything he's been asked to do. He's the kind of person that we should want (in our city) and that's why we've been fighting so hard on his behalf for the last three years."

Magliocchetti and Tretter have offered Leone legal representation since 2014. To make the community aware of Leone's situation, the lawyers have teamed with State Rep. Andy Vargas and local advocacy group the Merrimack Valley Project.

Vargas used his Beacon Hill connections to rally support from the likes of Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Sen. Edward Markey and Congresswoman Niki Tsongas.

"Everyone is trying to help, as is Andy Vargas. He's the one that put us in touch with the Merrimack Valley Project on behalf of Jacob. This truly is a community action, if you will," Magliocchetti told WHAV. "Like I said, if there's ever a story to be told and a reason to fight for someone, this is the case."

Tretter intends to pursue avenues for appeal, though chances are slim, he said.