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Hundreds attend state meeting on Swift raid

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Marshalltown, Ia. — Hundreds of people affected by Tuesday's raid of the Swift & Co. plant by immigration agents filled the pews of St. Mary's Catholic Church here tonight to listen to state officials say help is on the way.

Cynthia Eisenhower, Gov. Tom Vilsack's chief of staff, read a letter from the governor addressed to "Dear Marshalltown Friends."

In the letter, Vilsack stressed that "federal officials took action without notice to the state" when it conducted Tuesday's raid on the Swift pork plant.

Vilsack said he asked state officials to go to Marshalltown tonight, "not to debate the immigration policy of this country, but to offer help and assistance to the families whose lives have been turned upside down."

Matt Paul, Vilsack's spokesman, said after the meeting that Vilsack plans to visit Marshalltown on Tuesday.

Details of the visit haven't been finalized, Paul said. Vilsack's presidential campaign schedule includes a 7:45 p.m. community meeting at the Best Western Inn, 3303 S. Center St. in Marshalltown.

"Governor Vilsack has talked at length about the need for immigration reform," Paul said. The raid on the Swift plant "was irresponsible and inexcusable. It was not carried out in a humane way and, because of that, the state will have to respond."

Armando Villareal, administrator of the Iowa Division of Latino Affairs, said lawyers Ta Yu Yang of Des Moines and Miryam Antunez de Mayolo of Cedar Falls met after the meeting with about 50 families needing legal assistance.

Antunez, who has been retained by the United Food and Commercial Workers union to give legal representation to its members who have been detained, said lawyers for the detained workers can request that their administrative court hearing on deportation be moved to Iowa.

It is difficult, but not impossible, to cancel a deportation order, she said. "You have to fight for your case," she said.

Villareal, who hosted the meeting, said it was called to give people affected by the raid an opportunity to find out what can be done for them.

"We are living through historical times," he said, "and Marshalltown is at the head of this history."