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**A BEACON OF HOPE IN WESTCHESTER COUNTY**

 If you are looking for evidence that one leader and a committed group of activists can make a big difference, look no further than Rabbi Aaron Brusso and his congregation Bet Torah in Mount Kisco.

 The facts of Bet Torah's story of courage and persistence began one night in February 2018, with the wrongful arrest of Armando, the synagogue's custodian. Local County police immediately reported his undocumented status to ICE, which quickly set the wheels of deportation to Mexico in motion. Two weeks later, without notice to his family and any legal appeal allowed, he was deported. With no money, ID, or phone, Armando made his way to Puebla, where he faced grave danger and violence because of the ongoing persecution of his family.

 Rabbi Brusso and his congregation decided to help bring Armando back to the U.S. border. It took two attempts to return Armando from Mexico to New York State. Finally, in May 2018, Armando was placed in custody in Albany. Bet Torah's efforts to secure his appeal for asylum--including a significant rally on his behalf; distribution on social media of a film by a congregant/documentary filmmaker to demonstrate the harm Armando's removal caused, and letters sent to immigration judges--failed. On November 15, an immigration judge in Batavia, NY, issued a deportation order for December 26.

 From the initial arrest and deportation in February to this second deportation order in November, Armando's family was emotionally and financially stressed. As a result, Bet Torah's congregants visited the family regularly, delivered meals, and provided rides to appointments as well as provided direct financial assistance. In addition, Rabbi Brusso and the community reviewed all their prior contacts and strategies. As a result, they were in touch with a Justice Dept lawyer willing to work with Armando's lawyer. It was the combination of the Justice Department contact and the recent decision of Federal Judge Emmet Sullivan to restore a broader definition of asylum that produced a stay of deportation. Officials set bail, and Armando was released on December 28, 2018. He rejoined his family and is currently trying to secure permanent legal residence here.

 Given Bet Torah's inspiring profile in courage and commitment, it seems natural and logical for those of us who care about the plight of immigrant children and other asylum seekers to seek out ways to help them. Working together with [the Westchester Jewish Coalition for Immigration](http://www.wjci.org) (WJCI), a coalition of over thirty synagogues and more than 100 persons from around the county, we can summon a power that the action of one individual cannot match.

 Together wecan inspire and be inspired by our efforts.