Emilia Castañeda

Emilia Castañeda was born in the Boyle Heights area of Los Angeles, California in 1926 and attended school in Los Angeles until 1935 when she and her family were deported to Gomez Palacio, Durango, Mexico. She attended school for a short time in Mexico and worked as a child from a very early age. She longed to return home to her beloved Los Angeles and did so in 1944. She immediately attended adult school to relearn English where she had attended elementary school and began working. Emilia has been a social justice activist for over sixty years in community, school, union, and political efforts including worker rights, equal pay and benefits for women, union representation for farm workers, support for the disabled and health care reform. She courageously agreed to be the lead plaintiff in Emilia Castañeda vs. California sponsored by MALDEF in 2003. In 2003 she was a witness at the California State Senate hearing on the unconstitutional deportation of Mexican Americans during the 1930s. Her brave testimony at the hearing, the State Senate Education Committee in 2008 and in other venues has been instrumental in California apologizing for the grievous injustice affecting over one million Americans. Her testimony at the State Assembly was instrumental in helping the passage and signing of AB 146 which recommends that the unconstitutional deportation of the 1930s be part of the California social studies curriculum. She continues to promote efforts for inclusion of this expulsion in the social studies curriculum. Emilia was honored by the California Association for Bilingual Education Parent Volunteer of the Year and was named a California State Senate Woman of the Year in 2006. She is mother of three daughters and grandmother of two.