



LATINO LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE OF NEW JERSEY

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April 6, 2007

The Honorable Donald Cresitello
Mayor
Town Hall
200 South St. CN914
Morristown, NJ 07963-0914

Dear Mayor Cresitello

The Latino Leadership Alliance of New Jersey (LLANJ) is the largest Latino advocacy organization in New Jersey, and represents most of the leading Latino organizations across the state. The mission of the LLANJ is to mobilize and empower Latino communities to obtain political, economic, and social equity. LLANJ is one of New Jersey's leading advocates for Comprehensive Immigration Reform and over the past year we have been working with a coalition of local and national organizations to pass legislation that is fair, comprehensive and offers undocumented immigrants already living in the United States a path to earned immigration status.

LLANJ writes this letter to ask that you do not proceed with the request for certification of the Morristown Police Department, under Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. This anti immigrant action by the City of Morristown is dividing the Morristown community along ethnic lines and exposing the City of Morristown to additional financial burdens at a time when New Jersey tax payers are facing ever increasing property taxes.

It is no accident that 10 years after the enactment of this legislation, not one municipality in the entire United States is involved in this program. There are good reasons why municipalities that have looked at the goals and provisions of Section 287(g), and the likely costs and benefits, have decided not to proceed. Your stated intent to crack down on contactors who hire unauthorized immigrants, and landlords who allow housing code violations, is far removed from the purpose of Section 287(g) which is to provide resources and latitude to "pursue investigations relating to violent crimes, human smuggling, gang/organized crime, narcotics, and money laundering".

Many practical concerns have been raised against local police involvement in immigration enforcement, other than in connection with "serious criminal activity". These concerns range from the difficulty of avoiding racial profiling; to the drain of resources from other police duties; to the lack of capacity at the federal level to process the added volume of detainees; and the assured negative impact on community-police relations among the immigrant population. These concerns have also been echoed by the Morristown Chief of Police who has publicly expressed his ambivalence about this plan.

There are also economic factors to be considered. Whereas the federal government would underwrite the training itself, Morristown would still have to pay the salaries of the officers during their training and, subsequent appearances in immigration courts in Newark, plus all other related costs. Pulling officers away from their other duties for training and immigration court appearances is bound to have a deleterious impact on overall local law enforcement initiatives, as well as on the case load of your municipal court. Given the potentially high additional overtime cost burden that would be placed on the police force and municipal courts, additional scarce local revenues (taxes) would have to be increased. The taxpayers of Morristown need to know what the financial impact of this initiative will be, something that has yet to be quantified by the Town Council. There are no federal grants available to help cities pay for this program.

Historically, immigrants, whatever their modus of entry, have had an overall positive economic and social impact on America. Without them, this country's vibrant cultural diversity, its very essence, and billions of dollars in disposable income and gross domestic product would be lost, an impact that would linger for decades.

The ultimate solution to incorporating the undocumented immigrant population into the mainstream of our society and also minimizing the financial burden on municipalities lies in comprehensive immigration reform, which would incorporate legalization, legal channels for the hiring of low-skilled workers, along with employer enforcement, thus removing a major cause of the financial imbalances. Authorized immigrant workers would be paid over the table, be empowered to claim health and other benefits, have access to better housing, and be able to drive legally. As a result, tax revenues will increase, the cost of indigent care will be reduced, as will the case loads on municipal courts and the number of detentions. If municipalities, unilaterally, start to push immigrants out with initiatives like the one you are supporting, these xenophobic initiatives would trigger a "beggar thy neighbor" chain of events in which our quality of life would be would negatively affected.

We urge you to desist in your pursuit of this initiative, which many have correctly identified as shortsighted and counterproductive, and instead join the growing call for Congress to take action on the long overdue reform of our immigration system. We ask that you join us to push for Comprehensive Immigration Reform that will protect our American way of life, while celebrating the economic contributions and cultural richness of immigrants, and facilitating their incorporation, aboveground, to the life of our local community, state, and country.

Sincerely,

Martin Perez, Esq
President