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Groups ask Morristown to pull deputizing request

Attorneys call for study of program that would affect illegal immigrants

BY MINHAIJ HASSAN

DAILY RECORD

MORRISTOWN -- The Hispanic Bar Association has asked Mayor Donald Cresitello to withdraw his application to the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency to deputize Morristown police officers as federal immigration officers.

In a letter sent Wednesday, the HSBA, along with the Asian Pacific American Lawyers Association of New Jersey, asked the mayor to study the long-term effects of having such a program.

The lawyers said the plan "... will certainly lead to an increase of police stops and interrogation of persons of color whom the police believe are undocumented immigrants. It will also lead to a reduction in the reporting of crimes against undocumented immigrants out of fear of being separated from their families, incarcerated and deported."

The HSBA also said illegal immigrants will become "attractive victims to those who prey on the immigrant community" and will lead to mistrust of the local police department, causing a decrease in "the number of witnesses to criminal and civil wrongs who would otherwise come forward."

In addition, the lawyers' letter said, "We are further concerned about the prospects of vigilantism by untrained individuals wishing to expose those believed to be undocumented immigrants, which could lead to a host of unwarranted consequences, including abuse and harassment by residents and deputized officers."

Cresitello, who sent the application to ICE nearly two weeks ago, was not immediately available for comment on Wednesday night.

The mayor has said the move is intended to crack down on contractors who are hiring illegal aliens and avoiding paying taxes, as well as landlords who allow tenant overcrowding, a practice commonly known as "stacking."

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