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Morristown deputizing plan stirs up outcry

Advocates oppose town cops serving as immigration agents

BY MINHAJ HASSAN
DAILY RECORD

HANOVER TWP. -- Leaders of local, state, and federal Latin American groups Monday called on area residents to oppose Morristown Mayor Donald Cresitello's application to the federal government to authorize town police to serve as immigration agents.

The pleas came Monday morning at a press conference at the Morris County Library in Whippany. It was led by the American Friends Services Committee of Newark and a Morristown-based immigration resource center, Wind of the Spirit.

Al Pina of the Florida Minority Community Investment Coalition, said the town "is on a slippery slope" if it adopts such a policy and will make history in all the wrong ways.

"It (Morristown) will be considered one of the most racist cities in America," he said.

Xiomara Guevara, executive director of the Morris County Organization for Hispanic Affairs, said Morristown would set a precedent in Morris County by deputizing police officers.

"It's going to go to Dover and surrounding communities," she said. "It is not going to be Morristown the racist city. It will be Morris County the racist county."

None of Morristown's seven council members or Mayor Cresitello were at the press conference, which attracted about 50 people.

Cresitello sent the deputization application to the federal Immigration Customs Enforcement agency three weeks ago.

Stuart Sydenstricker, a member of Wind of the Spirit, said nearly 3,500 Morristown residents' signatures are in a petition, calling for the mayor to drop the application. He hopes the council will adopt a resolution calling on Cresitello not to go forward with the plan.

Undermining effect

Luis J. Diaz, president of the United States Hispanic Advocacy Association, a press conference panelist, said the policy could undermine the Latino community, especially the immigrants.

"If Morristown adopts the proposed plan, it could undermine our civil liberties and the very fabric of America," Diaz wrote in a letter to the town council. "As you consider this plan, we urge the Morristown City Council to weigh and carefully balance the benefits against the ethical issues raised, plus the civil, constitutional, justice, administration and business considerations as they relate to all of Morristown's residents, especially its poorest, weakest, and most victimized members -- the Hispanic residents.

"Instead of adopting this plan, we urge you instead to join our leaders in calling on Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform and adopt foreign policies that only reward countries that provide for the economic well being of their own people," Diaz said. "You have the opportunity to show real leadership by joining all Americans in demanding a real solution. We need immigration legislation that will create a level playing field for the United States in a global, knowledge-based

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Luis J. Diaz, a Latino leader, believes the proposed plan to deputize Morristown officers as immigration agents could 'undermine our civil liberties and the very fabric of America.'

If you go

Tonight's town council meeting, at which a petition against deputizing town police as ICE agents is to be presented, starts at 7:30 p.m., at Town Hall, 200 South St.

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economy."

He said it is a "double standard" for the federal government to say they cannot secure the border, yet it has enough money to fight wars.

Duplicating effort

The Rev. Dean Bracewell, a pastor at the Spanish Alliance Church in Morristown, said there already exists a mechanism to prosecute felonies committed by illegal immigrants.

He said many of the immigrants are here "to work hard and make money" and provide a better life for their families.

Adopting the policy, he said, will hamper the immigrants' ability to do their work, especially in such jobs Americans are unwilling to do -- including laying brick, cutting lawns and working in restaurant kitchens.

"We cannot ignore their sweat equity," he said.

In addition, he said it will add to the police department's workload, and will make immigrants more hesitant in reporting crimes.

He added that "illegals will become a favorite target for criminals."

"Anyone without legal status will be afraid (to report crimes)," he said. "Vigilante groups could be created."

"Absolute power corrupts absolutely."

The Rev. Alice Miller said there is a need for a comprehensive immigration reform. The intent should be to celebrate their accomplishments and "not to criminalize or dehumanize" them.

Several members who were at the press conference are expected to attend tonight's council meeting.

Cresitello has said the idea of deputizing police officers is a way of cracking down on stacking and contractors who are hiring illegal citizens and avoid paying taxes.

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