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Latino leader asks feds to reject Morristown deputizing request

In letter to Chertoff, says mayor's plans not in line with purpose of the law

BY MINHAJ HASSAN
DAILY RECORD

MORRISTOWN -- A Latino advocacy organization has written a letter to federal Homeland Security Chief Michael Chertoff asking him to reject Mayor Donald Cresitello's application for training and authority for local police officers to enforce immigration laws.

Martin Perez, president of Latino Leadership Alliance of New Jersey, based in New Brunswick, said Wednesday Cresitello's intentions to use the program to crack down on contractors using illegal aliens and landlords who allow overcrowding goes beyond the law's intended scope.

Intent faulty

"Your stated intent to crack down on contractors who hire unauthorized immigrants, and landlords who allow housing code violations, is far removed from the purpose of Section 287G, which is to provide resources and latitude to 'pursue investigations relating to violent crimes, human smuggling, gang/organized crime, narcotics, and money laundering,'" the letter states.

Perez wrote that Cresitello and Councilman Dick Tighe are using the program to "expound their xenophobic thinking on immigration reform and to create what they perceive as political capital with certain segments of the voting population."

Cresitello said Wednesday that he hasn't seen the April 6 letter, and added that "it wouldn't make much of a difference."

"I am moving forward with my position," he said. "There's a serious violent crime problem, and this is the way to address it."

Tighe said the group's comment is way off base.

'A ridiculous statement'

"Other than the fact it's a ridiculous statement, it's not worthy of comment," Tighe said in a telephone interview.

Several state police groups nationwide have the designation, but thus far Herndon, Va., is the only town to have 287G designation for local police.

Some 300 people packed a Morristown council meeting on March 27 where the 287G plan was discussed. About half the people supported Cresitello's move, and half were against it.

Councilman Timothy Jackson said he was "very angry" that some of the demonstrators at the March 27 meeting blocked three residents from entering town hall.

"These were longtime residents, taxpayers, who were denied entry to town hall," Jackson said. "I'm very angry about that. I just want that on the record."

The issue was also on the minds of some people at this week's council meeting. Eighth-grade student Roel Flores said 287G would create anti-immigrant sentiment in the community, civil liberties could be violated, and children could be negatively impacted if their parents are deported.

Perez's letter also stated that it would strain relationships between the town's immigrant population and the local police department.

"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," Perez wrote. "These concerns have also been echoed by the Morristown Chief of Police who has publicly expressed his ambivalence about this plan."

In a March 22 memo to Cresitello, Morristown Police Chief Peter Demnitz expressed concerns about 287G.

"Such a plan will have a huge impact on the police agency and its resources," Demnitz wrote.

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