



## Morristown accused of discrimination

Hispanic groups suggest government policies to help illegal immigrants

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Two statewide Hispanic groups yesterday accused Morristown of discriminating against immigrants and unveiled recommendations on ways state and federal officials can ease burdens on foreign-born residents.

Morristown's effort to join a federal program that deputizes police to enforce immigration law is an effort "to get rid of the Latino community," said Martin Perez, president of the Latino Leadership Alliance of New Jersey, which held two news conferences yesterday with the Hispanic Directors Association of New Jersey.

Morristown Mayor Donald Cresitello rejected the groups' criticism, saying the town is cracking down on crime and safety violations, not on immigrants.

"They just lack credibility," he said of the groups. "They certainly aren't going to influence me."

The mayor has asked the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency to train and deputize local police. The town's application is now under review by ICE, Cresitello said.

Yesterday, the mayor said police would use the federal powers against those who commit serious crimes. Cresitello also has said that ICE-trained police could crack down on tenants living in overcrowded homes and contractors who hire illegal immigrants.

Immigrants living in Morristown have been involved in drug dealing, prostitution, money laundering and even slavery, according to the mayor. An illegal immigrant has been charged with the 2001 murder of a boy, and two others have been charged with a 2005 rape.

Perez said yesterday that most immigrants -- even those in the country illegally -- work hard and do not commit crimes. The federal government looks on immigration violations as a civil matter, not as crimes.

The mayor "is making blanket statements that really don't apply to the community," Perez said. "That's understandable politically, but I think it's a shame as a human being."

The dual news conferences -- in Morristown and Hightstown -- aimed to highlight the difference between the two towns' stance on immigration.

In the Mercer County borough of Hightstown, Mayor Robert Patten has a Latino advisory committee and the council has directed police and local officials not to report illegal immigrants to federal agents.

Immigrants bring money and vitality to the borough, Patten said yesterday. When problems have arisen -- such as people living in crowded homes -- borough officials ask the Latino advisers to help sort it out, he said.

"We're getting a lot of cooperation, and I think it's because we're reaching out to the community," he said.

The two Latino groups yesterday also called on state and federal officials to enact the following policies:

- The state's congressional delegation should support immigration reform, including an "earned path to citizenship."
- ICE should suspend raids on workers.

- Gov. Jon Corzine should guarantee that the Department of Children and Families "will not discriminate against children in undocumented families." There are no known instances of such discrimination, according to a spokesman for the governor.
- The state should allow illegal immigrants to pay in-state tuition at colleges. The governor supports legislation allowing that, a spokesman said.
- A "driving privilege card" should be available to those who can't verify that they're in the country legally. It's not clear whether the state could issue such a card, given security concerns, according to a spokesman for the governor.
- Complaints about unpaid wages should be heard more quickly.
- The Division of Consumer Affairs should launch a public education campaign against rip-off schemes targeting immigrants. According to a spokesman for the governor, state officials are working on a response to that request. David Wald, a spokesman for the division, said Consumer Affairs already publishes material in Spanish, among other outreach efforts.

The governor "has been a leader on immigrant issues since his time in the Senate," spokesman Brendan Gilfillan said in a statement yesterday. "He has shown his support for the immigrant community through his budgets, through his interactions with the federal government and through the actions taken by his cabinet departments."

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