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## Cresitello defends immigration enforcement plan

At Wind of Spirit forum, says police would be trained against racial profiling

*By Vanessa Vera*  
*Daily Record*

MORRISTOWN -- Mayor Donald Cresitello defended his proposal to have local police enforce federal immigration laws during a forum Saturday that included a panel of immigration lawyers and advocates.

Held at St. Margaret Church, the forum was sponsored by Wind of the Spirit, a local immigrant resource group, and other organizations. It focused on Morristown's application to be included in a federal program called 287g, which would deputize local police officers to enforce immigration laws.

Wind of the Spirit held two previous forums on the subject, but this was the first time Cresitello was invited to present his position, said Stuart Sydenstricker, 53, a Wind of the Spirit board member.

Cresitello told the panel and about 75 people in the audience that he supports legal immigration and "strong border enforcement through 287g." He also said Morristown "has a history of dealing with people fairly," and that police would be trained to not profile ethnic groups should the program be implemented here.

Panelist Aarti Shahani, who teaches immigration history at NYU, said local police often misuse the powers of 287g, targeting day laborers and those who commit traffic violations. She said the program is not intended to target those groups. The implementation of 287g, Shahani said, makes "a broken (immigration) system more broken."

A recent report by the Government Accountability Office found that local police sometimes used 287g to prosecute minor crimes. It recommended that federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials clarify the program's goals for local authorities.

Cresitello said he agreed with the report's recommendations. He said the report found no major problems with the program, although he acknowledged that it pointed out some issues.

"But there are issues with all laws," he said.

Sydenstricker, of Morristown, characterized Cresitello's position on 287g as "very anti-immigration." But he added that the purpose of the forum was to give people the chance to ask questions and "hopefully have an honest conversation about immigration."

Ed Ramirez, 61, an audience member from Morristown and a sixth-generation Hispanic-American, said he supports implementation of 287g.

"If it has problems, it should be fixed, but it also should be strengthened so the law could be enforced," Ramirez said. "No law works properly if it's mismanaged."

Maria Martinez, 40, of Morristown, came to the U.S. from El Salvador in 1996. She said police officers

should not double as immigration officers.

"The police need to be separate, and immigration separate," she said.

She said many immigrants have left Morristown because of the proposal, and that undocumented immigrants who are crime victims might avoid calling police for fear of being deported.

"If I don't have papers, how am I going to call the police?" she said. "It shouldn't be that way."

Randolph resident Jose Mauricio Lopez, 53, said he's concerned that if 287g is approved, police would target people because of their ethnicity.

"Morristown or any other place (doesn't) need this ... because we have enough laws to enforce and prosecute the crimes," Lopez said.

After the forum, Cresitello said he wasn't swayed by arguments against 287g. He claimed few members of the audience were from Morristown.

"I think (that) says that the people support the program," he said.

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