

Is 287(g) on the backburner? That depends on who you ask in Morristown

Posted by [jjduffy](#) August 03, 2009 07:00AM



Uriel MejiaThe crowd numbered nearly 200 at S. Margaret's Church for the July 28 forum on 287(g).

The parish hall at St. Margaret's R.C. Church on Speedwell Avenue in Morristown was filled last week with nearly 200 mostly Spanish speaking people, who came to learn more about 287(g), the federal program designed to allow local police to serve as immigration officers.

When local activists heard that [Morristown had been chosen](#) last month as one of 11 towns to implement this program, it sent another wave of fear into the Latino community here.

The controversial measure, criticized nationwide by immigrants rights groups, has been a hot button issue in Morristown ever since Mayor Donald Cresitello put it on the table in February 2007.

"The program criminalizes the Latino community population, but the gravest concern is jettisoning the need for police to obtain search warrants when entering domiciles," said Diana Mejia, a community organizer with the American Friends Service Committee in Newark and a co-founder of the local immigrant rights group, Wind of the Spirit, which sponsored the forum.

In attendance were many Latinos who held legal status, but were worried about friends, relatives, or families of mixed documentation, including two North Americans who were married to Latinas but did not specify their status, Mejia said.



Uriel Mejia Wind of the Spirit

volunteer Arthur Linderman of Long Valley speaks to nearly 200 people at St. Margaret's R.C. Church on Speedwell Avenue, July 28. The mostly Hispanic crowd came to learn about 287(g), a federal program that allows police to act as immigration officers.

'THEY GET PROFILED ALL THE TIME HERE'

The forum featured Arthur Linderman, a Long Valley attorney and WotS volunteer who fielded questions in Spanish.

What was the crowd's main concern?

"They wanted to know whether or not this was going to mean increased persecution," said Linderman who has offices in Dover and Hackensack. "Despite what they say, Morristown is a pretty inhospitable place for Latinos. They get profiled all the time there. I don't care what their manuals say."

But for town officials and some Morristown residents, the issue has been moved to the backburner.

That was the word used by Police Chief Peter Demnitz.

With a new administration coming in in January -- Cresitello lost his June primary bid for re-election to former Democratic councilman Tim Dougherty -- and no money in the 2009 budget to implement the 287(g) program, Demnitz is focusing on other matters.

There has been little public discussion by the council since its July 21 meeting, where town attorney Jonathan Williams and business administrator Michael Rogers indicated that no formal notification had been sent to Morristown. They said the only notice of Morristown's inclusion was an announcement on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) website.

Williams also said the council will have to vote on the matter once again, even though two years ago the council approved Cresitello's application to ICE, (Immigration and Customs Enforcement), the DHS agency that oversees 287(g).



Uriel MejiaGladiz Quevedo kept the little ones busy.

'WHO SAID THERE'S NO MONEY?'

Mayor Cresitello said last week he continues to be optimistic that 287(g) will come to his town.

The mayor was not at the July 21 council meeting when Williams made his remarks. But he said he received a phone call at town hall and at home around July 10 from a government official in Washington, D.C., along with subsequent emails, confirming Morristown's inclusion in the program.

"We are just waiting for the documents," Cresitello said.

Acknowledging there is not enough time left in his administration to train the entire 58-person police force, he suggested that six officers be trained at a time--preferably in Morristown.

"Who says there's not money available?" Cresitello said. "We'll wait until we get the documents and see what we're going to do."

Demnitz said the training is five weeks long, and ICE won't do the training locally unless 20 officers are involved.

That probably would mean sending six officers to Virginia for training at the government's expense, the chief said.

Transportation, lodging and meals would have to be picked up by Morristown. Adding to the cost would be probable overtime expenses, at an average of \$53 an hour, although Demnitz said he would try to find creative solutions.

Since 2006, 66 municipalities have operated under 287(g) agreements and 1,000 police officers have been deputized, according to the July 10 press release from DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano.

Besides Morristown, other new locations are the Monmouth County (NJ) Sheriff's Office, the Gwinett (GA) Sheriff's Department, the Rhode Island Dept. of Corrections, the Delaware Dept of Corrections - Sussex Correctional Institution, the Guilford County (NC) Sheriff's Dept., the Charleston County (SC) Sheriff's Dept and the police departments in Houston, Mesquite, (NV), Mesa (AZ) and Florence (AZ).

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