

Frey Addresses Immigration Issues

By Bonnie Hobbs
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Federal immigration reform and the local community were among the topics discussed at a recent meeting of the Centreville Immigration Forum. Brett Katinsky, crime-prevention officer with the Sully District Station, spoke about pedestrian safety, and Supervisor Michael R. Frey (R-Sully) addressed legal issues.



Photo by Bonnie Hobbs/Centre View

Since day laborers have taken to gathering outside the Centreville Regional Library while waiting for work, during the last legislative session, Del. Tim Hugo (R-40) got a bill passed making loitering outside libraries an offense. It will take effect July 1 — but only in those localities adopting it.

Sully Supervisor Michael Frey

"It's not a law unless they do," said Frey. "And the [Fairfax County] Board of Supervisors has no intention of adopting it. I don't see that it adds anything to the [loitering] ordinance. Our definition of loitering is not just hanging out — it's hanging out on public property and committing an action or offense that's prohibited, such as harassing pedestrians. So the mere act of gathering on a sidewalk is not a violation."



Photo by Bonnie Hobbs/Centre View

Police Officer Brett Katinsky

He said there's been no resulting decrease in library usage. However, he told the forum members, "I'd advise you to tell these men to stay away from the library. It can be intimidating to a mother with children to see them gathered there. It's a valid concern, and it's also a concern of the library staff." Frey suggested the laborers instead stay on the sidewalks.



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"Immigration is a federal issue, and it's going to be enforced piecemeal, unevenly and with mixed success if local jurisdictions are forced to do it," he said. "The police need eyes and ears to help solve crimes, so they need to have good relations with the immigrant community."

IN MID-MAY, President Obama expanded a program in which Fairfax County is already involved. Deputy sheriffs will do background checks on people booked into jails, because criminal activity — especially gang activity — is a concern.

"We don't believe our officers should check immigration status for anyone pulled over," said Frey. "And for a jurisdiction of our size, we have the lowest crime rate in the country — and we do it with half the officers of other jurisdictions because we have wonderful officers and tremendous communities that want to work with the police."

This past school year, he said, Fairfax County received 1,000 additional students that came from Prince William County. Said Frey: "It was because of the economy, and no work there for transients — and also because Prince William's Board [of Supervisors] sent a message that it's anti-illegal immigrants."

He said the U.S. needs immigration reform and he's glad the administration is tackling it. "It'll be interesting to see what Congress does," said Frey. "There has to be compromise, and I hope something does pass because we can't do it at the local level. It's a bureaucratic nightmare for small-business owners to try to check their employees' documentation to determine whether they're legal."

As for providing services to people who may be illegal, he said, "In health care and education, we are prohibited from asking if someone's illegal. In most other areas, we're required to check people's status. This includes housing, child-care subsidies and home care for senior citizens. We're prohibited from providing them these services without proper documentation."

Frey said a new, federal immigration policy will take compromises, "But I don't think people will accept them until the borders are secure. People come here because we're the beacon on the hill — the strongest economy in the world."

Alice Foltz of Wellspring United Church of Christ, said part of the solution has to be "a reasonable, application process for people coming in." But, said Frey, "You've got to address all the facets and try to be fair to everybody, including those waiting on a list to get in. So reform can't come at someone else's expense. We need to adopt a reasonable, sensible immigration policy and enforce it."

STUDENTS FROM GMU have recently been speaking with Centreville's immigrant day laborers as part of a project they're doing, and Foltz said they learned that most of them are from Honduras and Guatemala. But more than that, from their personal stories they told the students, they also discovered "the desperation that drove them here is overwhelming. They had no way to support their families or have a future in their home

countries."

Frey then thanked the Centreville Immigration Forum for its efforts to reach out and try to help these people. "From a human standpoint, it's the right thing to do," he said. "It's nice to know the churches here care — and God love you for it — and He does."

Barb Shaiko, with Centreville United Methodist Church's Grace Ministries program — which provides clothing and diapers to local people in need — said the number of people coming each month is increasing. "In April, we had 175 families, and in May, 206," she said. "They're coming from Centreville, Herndon, Reston and Prince William."

Shaiko said 95 percent are Hispanic but, "With the economy, we're now also seeing African-American, Caucasian, a family from Iraq and we've even started to see some Asians — so it's crossing all lines. The numbers are climbing and we still need clothing donations." They may be brought to the church at the corner of New Braddock and Old Centreville roads in Centreville. For more information about Grace Ministries, call 703-830-2684.



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