

## Frey Speaks about Immigration Calls worker center "common-sense solution."

By [Bonnie Hobbs](#)

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**Sully District Supervisor Michael Frey talks about the worker center.**

Addressing the last meeting of the Centreville Immigration Forum (CIF), Supervisor Michael R. Frey (R-Sully) discussed the changing face of the district he serves. He also called a worker center here a "common-sense solution" to a community problem.

"The census is complete and, no surprise, diversity has continued to grow," he said. "Sully District has the largest Asian percentage, 23 percent, of any of the county's magisterial districts. Diversity has grown in the western part of the county as immigration continued. People began families and moved here because, relatively speaking, it's a little more affordable to live here."

Stressing that the "overwhelming majority" of the residents believe diversity is "healthy and a good thing" for the community, Frey said the "opportunities presented by this diversity to all of us makes for a very rich life. Assimilation and acculturation by the various immigrant groups is occurring far faster than ever before because of technology and the schools."

Immigration has always been controversial, he said, and a part of American history. "A certain segment has always resisted it," said Frey. "Today's no different, and we just have to accept that some people don't like change and will oppose it. But I don't think that's the majority."

"Many say the focus of our efforts should be to enforce immigration law," he said. "The [Fairfax County] Board of Supervisors has never adopted that philosophy. Immigration is an issue to be worked out at the national level, and the county has no desire to get in the middle of [it]. It's against the law to be in this country illegally, but it's not the job of the Fairfax County Police Department to enforce that — there's real crime for them to focus on."

Frey said day-labor sites are relatively new and have only sprung up in the past decade. "They're evidence of a changing economy," he said. "Businesses looked for people to hire for a specific job, and it caught on. Tourism, construction and the service industry have jobs they can't fill with Americans — and that's what brings immigrants here."

"So we shouldn't be surprised by the existence of day-labor sites," he said. "These centers aren't unique to Centreville. The efforts to calm fears and correct misperceptions are good things, and I commend Alice and those involved with the CIF for all your hard work — it is a daunting task."

To him, said Frey, "The concept of a gathering place or center is a common-sense solution to these fears and misperceptions. I understand when women have expressed fears about going to the library or shopping centers because of large gatherings of men [waiting outside for potential employers]. Any large gathering of men can be intimidating, no matter what their ethnicity."

Since the idea of a worker center here came from the community and churches, he believes that bodes well for its success. And it's now spread beyond the community, as well, since GMU students have also helped with Centreville's day-laborer population.

"When people who are against it say we should enforce the immigration laws, I



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tell them they should call their congressman and that we can't solve [the national immigration issue] here," said Frey. "But we can make our community more hospitable and welcoming and more humane. We can enforce some rules to make sure the workers get paid."

"This isn't a county-funded program, but I think there's clearly community support," he continued. "I'm happy to be of any help I can, and we can solve [people's] concerns. I'm proud and pleased to work with the CIF, and I look forward to getting the center open soon and addressing the problems we've had."

A male resident noted that most of the perceptions he's heard about the local immigrants "have dealt with fears, not with facts." And he asked if there's been more crime where the men have gathered, hoping for jobs.

To the contrary, replied Frey, "This area has had lower crime statistics than many other communities. The [loitering] problems at the 7-Eleven in Herndon and its nearby [neighborhoods] returned when Herndon's worker center was closed."

Underscoring what Frey said, Lt. John Trace, assistant commander of the Sully District Station, said, "We as a police agency do not enforce immigration laws, and the Sully District has one of the lowest crime rates of the entire county."

Centreville Square business owner Jim Daniels added, "I haven't noticed any increase in crime in our area, and I've gotten to know some of the workers as customers. As a result, I became involved with the CIF."

Centre Ridge is one of the neighborhoods closest to where the day laborers have been gathering, and Melinda Artman — with the Centre Ridge Neighborhood Watch — said she's totally for the establishment of a worker center in Centreville. "At first, people in my community thought every car break-in was because more immigrants had come here," she said. "But the facts are otherwise."

Now, saiman, "We'll be able to take care of the fear factor by having a day-labor center. It'll be supervised and will minimize the exploitation of workers. I'm thrilled that it's opening and I'm glad to be a part of the CIF. Mike Frey does a hell of a job, and we owe him a debt of thanks for having the political courage to step up, and Al Dwoskin, too, for being a good community leader."



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