



# 911 is a Joke in Yo Town

## No rights for undocumented victims of crime?

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A recent Kevin Siers cartoon in the Charlotte Observer said more than a million words. In it, an undocumented injured person lay on the ground. Meanwhile, a well-dressed Mayor Pat McCrory Mirandizes the man: "An immigrant victim of crime? You have the right to remain silent about this mugging! If you give up that right anything you say can be used against you in your deportation hearing!"

The illustration came with the headline "Mayoral Meddling." It was an editorial criticizing McCrory's intervention after Police Chief Darrell Stephens restated that it is not Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department policy to inquire about the immigration status of people targeted by criminals.

This story began in mid-May when a kind ice cream vendor, Eder Lucero Cubillas, was robbed at gunpoint by two felons. The thieves took \$60, a day's earnings for the 23-year-old merchant born in the turbulent Mexican state of Chiapas. Lucero Cubillas contacted the police to report the robbery, but the officer in charge decided to focus her interview on his immigration status.

The officer's procedure was a stab in the back of the Police International Relations Unit, which has worked hard since its inception in December 2000 to gain the trust of the undocumented community. More than 500 robberies of Latinos were reported that year in Charlotte. It was open season against undocumented immigrants, who also suffered home invasions. IRU implemented a Latino Robbery Initiative, which focused its efforts on decreasing Hispanic victimization of crime.

When 21 percent of burglaries in the city were committed against Hispanics, CMPD encouraged victims of crimes to report incidents, despite their immigration status. Capt. Diego Anselmo, Sgt. Chris Couch and officers Daniel Hernandez, Carlos Pozo, Carmen Mendoza and Rene Quiles spoke at community gatherings, and have appeared on the Spanish-language station Radio Lider and in the pages of Spanish-language newspapers Mi Gente, Que Pasa, La Noticia, El Progreso Hispano, El Soplón and La Verdad.

That's why IRU members met with the Hispanic media on May 22, Chief Stephens explained in a memorandum to City Manager Pam Syfert. Stephens said IRU officers had told Spanish-language media that the actions of the officer who dealt with Lucero Cubillas were not consistent with the policy on dealing with victims of crime and "they were sorry the officer had not followed that policy."

Then came the absurd and unexpected reaction from McCrory.

"I'm not sure an apology was warranted," McCrory said, affirming that he has philosophical differences of opinion with the police chief, and that the mayor and city council shall set the policy of checking the immigration status of crime victims.

It seems McCrory has not even listened to the chairman of his own Immigration Study Commission, Alan Gordon, who has a logical answer to the question, "Why don't they just get legal?"

According to Gordon, even Superman, an illegal alien, cannot "just get legal" through the current immigration system. "Even if his US citizen girlfriend Lois Lane married Superman, or if his employer wanted to sponsor him, Superman could not get legal status," said Gordon.

If the super hero from Krypton faces those kinds of obstacles, can anyone imagine the sort of impediments a simple man like Lucero Cubillas must go through? I'm certain the ice cream vendor wishes to "just get legal" and work within the system. After all, he called the police. He dialed 911.

But we -- as a city and a culture -- failed him.

*Rafael Prieto Zartha is the editor of the Charlotte-based Spanish-language newspaper Mi Gente.*

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