



NEWS Local News

Rally to target Irving deportations

Group says program has some immigrants living in fear

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By **PATRICIA ESTRADA** / Special to *Al Día*

IRVING – A handful of community activists plans a rally Wednesday to denounce a program involving the Irving city jail, federal immigration authorities and the deportation of more than 1,600 illegal immigrants.

The demonstration is set for 7 p.m. Wednesday at Irving City Hall, according to some of the activists, who participated in a Saturday meeting with Mayor Herbert Gears. The meeting dealt with concerns raised by the 24/7 Criminal Alien Program, which, according to some of the activists, is causing panic among immigrants who fear some traffic offenses could lead to their deportation.

Some of the 12 or so people who gathered to speak with Mr. Gears listened to his explanation of how the program works and are in favor of educating immigrants so they know the consequences of not paying traffic citations or failing to appear in court. Others want the program to go away because they say it's splitting families through deportation and seems to be excessive punishment.

Under the program, when Irving police officers stop drivers and take them into custody after finding an arrest warrant, or if drivers don't have a license, they are taken to the city jail, where their immigration status is reviewed. If detainees cannot demonstrate that they are American citizens or that they are in the country legally, the police call immigration authorities.

Mr. Gears said that Irving officers are not discriminating against Hispanics because they don't ask about immigration status during the traffic stops. If drivers get caught speeding or running a red light but don't have any arrest warrants and do have a valid driver's license, they just go home with a traffic ticket. Only when drivers get arrested does their immigration status become an issue at the jail.

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