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CHPD and MAC host immigration forum

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Columbia Heights Police Chief Scott Nadeau answers questions generated by different groups at the community-police dialogue about immigration. (Sun Focus photo by Sarah Burghardt)

In the hindsight the presidential election, issues involving immigration have been on the top of the minds of many. As Columbia Heights is a community that flourishes with diversity, the city's Multicultural Advisory Committee (MAC) has heard a breadth of concerns from both documented and undocumented residents over the past few months. From confusion of facts to fear and uncertainty, the Columbia Heights Police Department decided to directly address these issues.

In conjunction with MAC, the CHPD hosted an immigration forum on April 18 to inform the public about the facts of municipal versus federal policing. Residents of all ethnicities, police officers, and state and city representatives came together at the Church of All Nations in Columbia Heights to address the topic at hand.

At the forum, the CHPD made it clear that no officer will ever ask about the immigration status of an individual.

To cement this promise, the police department released its own policy statement regarding immigration. The statement, posted on the city website and communicated to different multicultural groups within the community, was written to ensure a strong relationship and open communication between the police department and its residents.



Residents of all ethnicities, police officers and city and state representatives came together at the Church of All Nations in Columbia Heights to discuss questions on immigration. (Sun Focus photo by Sarah Burghardt)

“As a police agency, it is essential that we have the trust of all of our residents,” the statement reads. “And that we do not have or create barriers to residents wanting to work with us or report crimes.”

The policy ensures trust in the police department, which is necessary to operate successfully.

According to the Police Foundation, a national nonprofit dedicated to supporting innovation and improvement in policing, in order for a police department to be effective at crime control, they must have public support. Mutually cooperative and supportive relationships among residents and law enforcement authorities is essential to a safe community.

“Police must have community relationships that are based on legitimacy, and legitimacy comes from trust and transparency,” Columbia Heights Police Chief Scott Nadeau said. “The only way that we can build relationships with trust and transparency within our communities is to make sure that they know that we are here to serve them, and when I say ‘them,’ I mean everyone in our community.”

Nadeau said he has heard concerns from multicultural communities about gathering at places of worship or even attending their child’s school for a parent/teacher conference.



Residents of all ethnicities, police officers and city and state representatives came together at the Church of All Nations in Columbia Heights to discuss questions on immigration. (Sun Focus photo by Sarah Burghardt)

“We want to make sure that there is no confusion of what our role is and the federal government’s role,” he said. “Especially in cases where someone is a victim of a crime. We don’t want immigration or residency status to keep them from contacting us.”

The trust is necessary to ensure justice. Victims of sexual assault, domestic violence or home burglaries are just a few examples of residents who may shy away from reporting a crime if they are undocumented.

“We don’t want people to continue to be victimized because they don’t want to possibly expose themselves to risk of deportation,” Nadeau said.

These community dialogues are designed to communicate those facts to residents that hold this misconception.

This was the third community dialogue forum that the Columbia Heights Police Department has held. Columbia Heights Police Captain Lenny Austin said these dialogues have been helpful to communicate with residents of Heights and surrounding communities.

Following the immigration forum, Austin said the police department will be going through all the gathered information, as well as additionally meeting with MAC and local leadership.

“We want to continue to work through some of these concerns to try to make the community just that much safer,” Austin said. “Our focus is on public safety and crime reduction, so hopefully we can continue to take this information and continue to advance our mission.”

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[« Previous](#)
[Next »](#)