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RICHMOND

Officials meet with public over immigration raids Police captain and mayor try to soothe fears of residents

- [Delfin Vigil, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

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Richmond mayor Gayle

McLaughlin offered support to

nearly 1,000 residents who gathered Sunday afternoon to talk about an immigration sweep this month in which more than 100 undocumented immigrants were arrested in Contra Costa County.

"As the mayor, I'm here to give solidarity and support to families who in recent weeks have lived in a state of terror. I don't want our residents to live under terror," McLaughlin told the mainly Latino group in the gymnasium of St. Mark's Catholic Church in Richmond.

She said people are forced to migrate for survival, and that she intends to push forward a resolution to oppose the federal raids.

In "Operation Return To Sender," federal officials arrested 119 people in Contra Costa and deported 16 of them as of last week, according to Timothy Aitken, deputy director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement office in San Francisco. Some of the arrests were in Richmond.

Wearing uniforms that read "POLICE ICE" and using warrants, the agents targeted illegal immigrants with criminal records and those who evaded deportation orders. Of the 119 arrested, 18 were criminals and 94 were not on ICE's original wanted list, the immigration authority said.

The raids heightened fear and tension in largely immigrant communities. The meeting, organized by the Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization, was held to inform the public of their rights. An immigration lawyer advised people at the meeting



on how to handle a situation in which they're approached by an ICE agent.

"These agents come to our people's doors pretending to be police, they break their windows and scare them," said the Rev. Ramiro Flores, who allowed the meeting to be held at St. Mark's. "When the agents can't find who they're looking for, they'll just take anyone without papers. That is a violation of civil rights."

Many at Sunday's meeting said they had come only because Flores convinced them that the ICE could not arrest them on church property. A few spoke about their own and their friends' experiences, including arrests made while parents dropped off children at schools or while shopping for groceries.

One woman, who was afraid to give her name for fear that she would be targeted, said her husband was deported because a criminal once lived in their apartment. She said people who know her husband is gone have robbed her, but she won't call police for fear of being deported.

Richmond police Capt. Alec Griffin clarified his department's role in the raids.

"I'd like to tell you that we haven't worked with ICE in the last year, but that's not true," said Griffin, explaining that police detectives were tipped off by ICE with information on murder and gang cases. But he assured the crowd that the department's policy was not to respond to calls that involve only immigration complaints.

"We've worked hard to develop a relationship with the community," Griffin said. "If people are afraid to call police, that's a problem for all of us."

Council members Tony Thurmond, John Marquez and Ludmyrna Lopez sympathized with the crowd and said it was the city's responsibility to investigate the raids.

Also at Sunday's meeting were representatives from Democratic Rep. George Miller's, office and Kaye Burnside, West Contra Costa Unified School District's chief academic officer.

ICE officials were invited to the meeting but did not attend and were unavailable for comment.

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