

# Richmond pledges to keep immigrants feeling safe

## City Council calls for humane action, police to not take part in federal immigration sweeps

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Inside Bay Area

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The Richmond City Council on Tuesday night called for humane immigration reforms that would allow families to live, work and study without fear of being indiscriminately arrested.

The council unanimously reaffirmed a 1990 resolution following last month's weeklong crackdown on illegal immigrants by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. The sweeps resulted in more than 200 Contra Costa County arrests, mostly in Richmond and Concord.

About 300 members of the Latino community, many with small children in tow, filed into the council chambers Tuesday carrying placards that read "Stop separating families" and "Freedom in Richmond."

"We came here to support this resolution," San Pablo resident Jessica Peregrina said. "We came because what the law is doing is unfair and unjust to immigrants, and it has to be changed."

Speakers told the council that the sweeps have left thousands of people living in fear of being arrested in their homes, at work or while shopping at the corner grocery store.

"Children are afraid to go to school, and they are afraid their mothers won't come back from doing the laundry and their fathers won't come back from work," one speaker said.

Richmond High School, which is attended largely by Latinos, experienced a drop in attendance by about 150 students after the immigration arrests, Principal Orlando Ramos said Wednesday.

"We could not pinpoint it to the immigration raids, but based on what the kids were saying, it was because some students were afraid to come to school," Ramos said.

There also were higher than normal absentee rates at Chavez and Downer elementaries — both schools with large numbers of Latino students — after the raids.

In addition to the council's resolution, Richmond police Chief Chris Magnus received hearty applause when he assured those in the council chamber that the police department had no part in last month's sweeps and would not take part in any future federal immigration actions.

"We have worked very hard to build the best possible partnership with everyone in the community regardless of race, ethnicity and immigration status, and we don't want to jeopardize that," he said. "We want all of our residents to feel comfortable working with the police."

ICE agents regularly identified themselves as "police" in the course of last month's raids, which has fostered mistrust between immigrants and local authorities.

ICE officials repeatedly have said agents acted within the law to identify themselves as police and did not illegally arrest anyone. They said officials knocked on the doors only of targeted individuals and did not accost people at random.

The enforcement action, dubbed Operation Return To Sender, resulted in the arrests of 119 targeted immigrants and another 94 undocumented immigrants in Contra Costa. About half are Mexican citizens, and the rest are from Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Belize, India, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Afghanistan and Fiji.

Nationally more than 13,000 illegal immigrants have been arrested since the operation was launched in June.

The council approved the first immigration reform resolution in 1990 after a massive, one-day sweep. Federal, state and local law enforcement agencies cordoned off a large section of the downtown and began arresting people indiscriminately.

"This struggle is nothing new in Richmond," said Councilman John Marquez, who was a member of the council in 1990. "These agencies encircled the downtown and arrested people indiscriminately.

"They brutalized innocent people who happened to be in the area," he said.

Among those arrested was a decorated U.S. Marine. Federal officers threw him to the ground, injuring his shoulder and breaking his glasses, when he could not produce a green card.