



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose M. Serrano

Elected Officials and Immigration Advocates Stand Up for the Rights of Immigrant Families

José M. Serrano

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(Bronx, NY)- On Thursday, December 1st, Senator José M. Serrano (D-Manhattan/Bronx), Assemblymember Vanessa Gibson (D-Bronx), and Councilmember Helen Diane Foster (D-Bronx) held an immigration forum in the Highbridge Community in the Bronx. The event featured a three part discussion on Secure Communities (S-Comm), Immigrant Rights, and Paths to Citizenship.

The forum began with a presentation by the Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights on the dangers in the implementation of S-Comm. Local elected officials and immigrant's rights advocates denounced the program, which could compromise the public safety of New Yorkers by leading to the underreporting of crimes, and by making immigrants an increased target for criminals. There is also a concern that S-Comm could contribute to racial and ethnic profiling.

S-Comm is a federal program that checks fingerprints at local jails against Department of Homeland Security (DHS) database while booking detainees. This

provides Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with a constant technological presence at local police stations and jails. This initiative threatens to compromise the safety of all New Yorkers by encouraging racial and ethnic profiling, draining the resources of local police departments and contributing to the underreporting of crimes.

According to a report by the National Immigration Law Center, enforcement efforts have largely targeted persons accused of minor infractions, like traffic offenses, rather than violent criminals.

Andrea Callan of the New York Civil Liberties Union led a "Know Your Rights" presentation, which informed attendees of their rights when encountering police; and Carlos Diaz of Highbridge Community Life Center gave a presentation on various paths to becoming a citizen.

"Secure Communities is an initiative that will have a particularly devastating effect in the communities which I represent," said Senator Serrano. "We want to ensure that local law enforcement does not get into the business of deportation, and that the immigrant community is aware of their rights and responsibilities. Immigrants are the backbone of our communities, and we must stand together to prevent the separation of families in our neighborhoods."

"This is an opportunity for the residents of the Bronx to gain an understanding of the process and enable them to gain proper access towards citizenship. In addition, residents will receive information on workshops and programs to excel their quality of life," said Assembly Member Gibson.

"This forum is a means by which immigrants can be made aware of resources available to them as well as become more integrated in society without losing their identity," said Council Member Helen Diane Foster. "The dissemination and use of information provided will be the most valuable tool for the immigrant community to walk away with from the forum."

"New York City is the very epitome of our national melting pot," said New York Civil Liberties Union Statewide Advocacy Director Andrea Callan. "As a city that embraces immigrants, we know that all New Yorkers - regardless of their immigration status - should know their rights and how to protect themselves during an encounter with

law enforcement."

"We live in a difficult political moment where the ties between local police and immigration are growing. This discussion will provide some political and historical context to these developments and explain how deportation programs like Secure Communities work," said Lili Salmeron of the Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights.

Co-sponsors also included Highbridge Community Life Center, Sauti Yetu Center for African Women, Inc., and the Muslim Women's Institute for Research and Development.