

Few Immigrants in Laurel Attend Outreach Meeting; Police Sought to Calm Fears After Slaying

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Byline: Ruben Castaneda, Washington Post Staff Writer

Body

Laurel police were ready to reach out Tuesday night to Latino **immigrants** upset about a recent killing: Crime prevention literature was spread out on a table, and several civilian activists stood by, prepared to translate the presentations of English-speaking officers.

All they needed were some Latino **immigrants**.

Most of the 25 people who showed up for the **meeting** at the **Laurel** Community Center were Latino activists, many of them from the District and Montgomery County. But only about five **Laurel** residents showed up.

And none fit the demographic that **Police** Chief Roy Gilmore had said he wanted to reach: Spanish-speaking **immigrants**, many of whom do not report crimes committed against them because they distrust the **police** and the criminal justice system, are worried about their immigration status and **fear** retaliation.

The sparse turnout illustrated the difficulty in reaching **Laurel's** Latino **immigrants**, many of whom speak little English and work at night or care for their children **after** working day shifts.

Laurel police, with the help of a bilingual resident, produced fliers in Spanish to publicize Tuesday's **meeting**, and placed them in the mailboxes and on the doors of Latinos in apartment complexes. **Police** also sent a news release about the **meeting** to Spanish-language newspapers.

"If there's a disappointment I have tonight, it's not reaching the people I wanted to reach," Gilmore said at the conclusion of the two-hour **meeting**.

Gilmore decided to convene the gathering **after** the **slaying** last month of Gilberto Hernandez, 40, a Salvadoran dishwasher who was knocked to the ground and kicked repeatedly in the head. Hernandez lapsed into a coma and died Sept. 8, four days **after** the attack.

Police say robbery was the motive, though Hernandez's wallet was still in his pocket when rescue workers arrived.

Seven African American teenagers, all of whom have **attended Laurel** High School, have been arrested and charged with first-degree murder in the case.

Late last month, Gilmore and **Laurel** Mayor Frank P. Casula met with several Latino activists who were concerned that the attack was a hate crime. Afterward, Gilmore pledged to increase and improve his agency's **outreach** to the Latino community.

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Officials estimate that only several hundred of Laurel's 20,000 residents are Latino, but the number is growing rapidly, with many moving into Laurel to work in restaurants and motels along Route 1. Hernandez and two of his brothers were returning from their jobs at a Route 1 restaurant when they were attacked. The brothers escaped unharmed.

Police officials pledged to continue reaching out to Latinos, perhaps by holding such meetings in the daytime, before restaurant workers report to their jobs.

"We know it's gonna be tough, but we'll do it," said Lt. Margo Wenko, chief of patrol operations.

Classification

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Company: LAUREL HIGH SCHOOL (95%); LAUREL HIGH SCHOOL (95%)

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