

## Advocates for Immigrants Say Suffolk Officials Foster Bias

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### **Body**

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Advocates for immigrants praised the Suffolk County police yesterday for arresting four teenagers in the burning of a Mexican family's home on Long Island, but they also accused some elected officials and local leaders of fostering bias against immigrants.

A coalition of 24 advocacy groups made its criticisms at a news conference in Farmingville, in front of the charred house that was set on fire in the early morning of July 5. The immigrant family sleeping inside escaped after neighbors yelled and banged on the doors.

The groups commended the Suffolk police, who charged the four teenagers with bias crimes on Thursday. But the advocates said there was a deeper problem in Farmingville, a community of about 16,000, where some residents have organized in recent years to halt the arrival of hundreds of immigrants, many of them illegal.

"These young men grew up in an atmosphere where adults claiming to be speaking for the community depicted Latinos as criminals and terrorists," said Patrick Young, chairman of the coalition, the Long Island Immigrant Alliance.

The fire "was not an isolated incident," he said. Three years ago, at the house next door, two men picked up two Mexican immigrants on the pretense of hiring them but instead took them to a warehouse and beat them nearly to death.

Opponents of illegal immigrants say they overcrowd housing, burden local services, evade taxes and loiter while they wait to be hired.

Mr. Young accused Joseph Caracappa, a county legislator, of endorsing "the legislative agenda of a hate group" in proposing an English-only law for government agencies and of falsely suggesting there was an immigrant crime wave. He said a former legislator, Michael D'Andre, had condoned violence.

Robert J. Gaffney, the county executive, failed "to help Farmingville heal" and vetoed the Legislature's plan for a hiring hall for immigrant day laborers, Mr. Young said. He also called a local group, Sachem Quality of Life, "a contributing factor to tensions in the community."

In an interview, Mr. Caracappa dismissed the allegation that he endorsed a hate group's agenda. "I love it, absolutely love it when they criticize me," he said. "It shows the taxpaying residents I represent that I'm doing my job." He called the fire "an obviously terrible, stupid mistake by a bunch of youths that went horribly wrong" and said he had offered a reward for tips in the investigation.

Mr. D'Andre acknowledged once saying that if immigrants moved to his area, Smithtown, "we would be waiting with baseball bats." Later he said that he had spoken "figuratively" and apologized.

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"Violence is not the way to go," he said today. He sympathizes with Farmingville's original residents, he said, and he also welcomes immigrants, "but they've got to be legal and obey the law."

Mr. Gaffney deplored the fire as "abhorrent and despicable," said his spokesman, Tim Ryan. As for the hiring hall, "he does not believe it's appropriate to spend taxpayer dollars for people who are not paying taxes and for those who are hiring them who are also not paying taxes." He added, "Would a hiring hall have prevented a bunch of possibly deranged people from throwing an incendiary device into a house?"

A Sachem leader, Ray Wysolmierski, who calls illegal immigrants "terrorists," disputed the critics. "We're trying to save this neighborhood," he said, "and they're saying we have to treat our invaders and occupiers with respect."

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