

COUNTY CHIEF FINDS ALLY IN IMMIG BATTLE

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Body

SUFFOLK COUNTY Executive Steve Levy is taking his next step in trying to rid the county of illegal immigration.

At events in Port Jefferson and Danbury, Conn., yesterday, Levy and the mayor of that city announced a partnership called Mayors and Executives For Immigration Reform.

The two leaders said the "bipartisan, national coalition of elected officials" would lobby President Bush and Congress to "fix" the country's immigration laws.

"This is the right time to impart that message," Levy spokesman Ed Dumas said.

Levy and Danbury Mayor Mark Boughton also want the federal government to step up enforcement of existing immigration laws and ease the way for legal immigration, Dumas said.

The details of the proposal will still have to be worked out, but the thrust of it so far is a two-day trip to Washington as early as February.

During the first day, local elected officials such as Levy and Boughton would attend seminars to share with other local governments their best practices for dealing with undocumented immigrants.

On the second day, officials would visit Congress members to lobby for assistance to local governments that say they are bearing the financial burden of illegal immigration. They'll also push for more border enforcement.

Boughton brought the idea to Levy after reading about "some of the issues that the county executive is facing and he's facing some of the same issues in his city," Dumas said.

"He [Boughton] said, 'I'm sure there are other people like us - local elected officials that are left holding the bag . . . from the federal government's failure to enforce its own laws.' "

Some estimates put the number of illegal immigrants in Suffolk County at 35,000 to 40,000.

Dumas said Levy believed the alliance was a good idea because there is strength in numbers.

"Levy has become the de facto spokesperson for local elected officials and now his ideas are becoming more and more mainstream." lmunoz@nydailynews.com

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