

Duncan Blasts INS Dealings With Libraries

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Body

Federal immigration agents were rude and intimidating and acted beyond their authority when they demanded employment records from two Montgomery County libraries recently, County Executive Douglas M. Duncan said yesterday.

Duncan (D) said agents should have had a warrant when they asked a Long Branch Community Library supervisor July 21 to see records dating to 1986 to verify the citizenship of every employee. And an agent was unreasonable when she called the Silver Spring Community Library on July 18 to make a similar request, Duncan and a librarian said.

Benedict J. Ferro, the Immigration and Naturalization Service's district director for Maryland, said the visit to the Long Branch library, at 8800 Garland Ave., was routine and was conducted professionally. He said he was not familiar with the call to the Silver Spring library, at 8901 Colesville Rd.

"They have to respect the rights of our county workers," said Duncan, who added that this was the first time the INS had checked records of Montgomery employees. "And if they want to come in and question employees, they need a warrant."

Ferro, however, said INS agents do not need warrants to make such requests.

Jan Baird-Adams, manager of the Long Branch library, said she spoke to INS agent Kathleen Meyler and a male agent in her office. She said that the agents weren't rude but that she had to "negotiate" with them to go to the county government's Rockville offices, where the worker records are kept.

Larry Dickter, a librarian in Silver Spring, said a woman from the INS called to say agents would come to inspect records. Dickter said the agent became indignant when he explained that they should go to Rockville, instead.

"She really wouldn't take my explanation," Dickter said. "This is the first time I've been treated with that kind of disrespect."

Duncan said the county has not yet turned over any records to the INS because agents haven't gone to the Human Resources Department, where the files are kept.

He said he will send a letter today to INS Commissioner Doris M. Meissner complaining about the agents' behavior.

In particular, the agents' visit to Long Branch has caused concern among staff throughout the library system and in Montgomery County's Latino community, Duncan said.

"It's kind of interesting that they pick a library to visit that's in the part of the county that has the highest concentration of Latinos," Duncan said.

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Ferro said **INS** agents conduct visits similar to the one made to Long Branch at random and when they have received tips about violations.

Ferro said agents routinely ask for records to verify employees' citizenship dating to 1986 because that was when the law requiring employers to keep them went into effect.

He said yesterday that Montgomery officials have not contacted him about the visit or the call.

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