

NEIGHBORHOOD REPORT: COLLEGE POINT/FLUSHING;

For Day Laborers, a New Hurdle

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Body

Most mornings on Northern Boulevard, scores of men wait for vans whose drivers are searching for day laborers. The men, mostly Salvadorans and often undocumented, dicker over the day's wages. Recently, though, residents and storeowners have complained that the men are intimidating to passersby and customers.

Last week, the local City Council member, Julia Harrison, introduced an anti-loitering bill that would make it illegal to remain in a public place while "engaging in a course of conduct designed to harass, seriously annoy or alarm another person."

Ms. Harrison says the bill would not prohibit day laborers from simply assembling. But civil rights groups say it would give law-enforcement officials too much latitude, allowing them to target capriciously the newest and most desperate immigrants, who stand in the same spots where Irish and Italian laborers stood decades ago.

"Anti-loitering laws are already on the books," said Norman Siegel, director of the New York Civil Liberties Union. "If people are blocking streets, there are laws against that. The thing we have to do is work with the people."

St. John Vianney Roman Catholic Church allows day laborers to gather in its parking lot near Northern. A church secretary, Deborah Gonzalez, who has helped workers when employers refused to pay them, says the laborers are no trouble. "Some of them on Northern cause problems. There's sometimes a little drinking."

"But not these guys," she said. "They just want to work." N.O.

Classification

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