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COMMUNITY MEETING WITH SHERIFF OF WAYNE COUNTY N.C.

March 8 2007
FLOC Union Hall
Dudley, N.C.



FLOC President Baldemar Velásquez (standing) and FLOC Board Member Angelita Morrisroe (sitting to right of Velásquez) talk with N.C. Wayne County Sheriff Carey Winders (sitting to left of Velásquez) and his staff about community and immigrant issues.

The Latino and immigrant community in the area of the FLOC North Carolina office have expressed concern about the intentions of law enforcement agencies in the state. In response to these concerns, FLOC President Baldemar Velásquez and FLOC Board Member Angelita Morrisroe arranged a community meeting with the Wayne County Sheriff Carey Winders and some of his staff. The meeting was held on March 8 in the FLOC union hall in Dudley, where most of the community feels safe and open to express their concerns. About 125 local Latino residents came to the meeting.¹

Velásquez opened the meeting by thanking the Sheriff and his staff for meeting with the local Latino community, and welcoming them in the spirit of cooperation.

Sheriff Winders began by stating "I am your Sheriff", elected by the community to represent the community. He introduced his staff, and explained the difference between different law enforcement agencies, such as county sheriffs, city and town police, and the state Highway Patrol. He was careful to explain to the immigrant community that the function of his department was *not* immigration enforcement, and assured the people that his agency will not seek people out on immigration issues. He recognized that most immigrants have strong family values and are hard-working and honest people, and stated that the Sheriff's Department wanted to work *with* the community to ensure public safety and crime investigation, expressing appreciation for the community cooperation in a recent case.²

The issue of driver's licenses was raised by the community members present. North Carolina has strict rules for granting driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants, and it was obvious that the community felt strongly about this issue. One woman stated that they wanted to learn the regulations and to drive safely, but couldn't because they were not allowed to take driver's tests. Another man stated that many people were forced to drive without insurance because they couldn't get licenses.

Another issue that was raised was local gangs. It was clear that both the community and the Sheriff's Department were concerned about this issue. The Sheriff and community members discussed ways to control gang activity. The Sheriff said his department will not tolerate gang crime, and urged parents to warn their children about the consequences of gang activity to their families and the community. When someone expressed concern about helping the police investigate gangs because of their status, the Sheriff assured people that his agency will never arrest anyone for helping them, regardless of papers.

Several people also raised the issue of Latinos not being allowed to use the sports fields at local schools. The Sheriff indicated that the community should meet with the School Boards about this issue, as they are the ones legally responsible for such policies.

Velásquez asked Sheriff Winders to work with the community and state politicians to address the issue of driver's licenses. The Sheriff agreed, and plans were discussed for Angelita Morrisroe, Sergio Sanchez, and other representatives of the community to pursue this initiative with the Sheriff. Velásquez indicated that FLOC will support this effort with its broad structures of FLOC in the local community and in the state and national context.

Velásquez thanked the Sheriff and his staff for making the effort to meet with the local Latino community and for their cooperativeness in working with Latinos about their concerns. Sheriff Winders also expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to meet with the Latino community.

1. FLOC has been a strong grass-roots leader in the immigrant rights movement for many years, at the direction of our members, who are largely immigrants. For example, FLOC sued the Ohio Highway Patrol for racial profiling of Latino drivers (<http://www.nilc.org/immlawpolicy/arrestdet/ad057.htm>), and has held many immigrant rights rallies in both Ohio and North Carolina. FLOC's position on Immigrant Rights is indicated on our web site at <http://www.floc.com>.

2. The Major Cities Chiefs Association has taken a stand against law enforcement agencies having an immigration enforcement role, both because it the trust and cooperation with immigrant communities necessary in law enforcement and it drains resources from the primary functions of police agencies. See <http://www.houstontx.gov/police/nr/2006/nr060806-1.htm>.