

Hispanic Business Leader Chastises Montgomery County Council

'The Montgomery County Council has taken a very unusual position. That doesn't help us,' Jorge Ribas, president of the Mid-Atlantic Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

By [Tom Ramstack](#) | [Email the author](#) | May 5, 2011

The head of a Germantown-based advocacy organization for Hispanics is expressing concern about the Montgomery County Council's reluctance to participate in the federal [Secure Communities program](#).

The program would require Montgomery County detention centers to send inmates' fingerprints to a national database to help [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#) identify and deport illegal immigrants, beginning Sept. 27.

Council Chairman Ike Leggett and other council members investigated legal options to oppose the county's participation.

This week, [they dropped their opposition](#) after receiving a terse letter from ICE informing them they must comply with the Secure Communities program.

Jorge Ribas, president of the [Mid-Atlantic Hispanic Chamber of Commerce](#), accused Leggett and other council members of "political posturing" by opposing the program. The Chamber is an advocacy organization that promotes business among the Hispanic population.

Ribas said the Chamber supports allowing "decent people" to immigrate to the United States but wants to keep out criminals.

"If they're convicted of a crime, he or she should be deported," Ribas said.

If criminals from abroad are allowed to stay in Montgomery County, "the businesses are going to leave," Ribas said.

Last week, the Montgomery County Council passed a resolution that "encourages" Montgomery County police to "continue its current policy" of not participating in the Secure Communities program. The resolution was sponsored by Councilwoman Nancy Navarro, D-Eastern County.

"The Montgomery County Council has taken a very unusual position," Ribas said. "That doesn't help us."

This week, Montgomery County spokesman Patrick Lacefield told Germantown Patch the chances the Council would seek to oppose the Secure Communities program were “none.”

“Montgomery County will comply with the program when it is mandated this Sept. 27,” Lacefield said. “We will work with ICE to make sure it is applied fairly.”

The change of plans sparked an angry response from some members of the Hispanic population.

Gustavo Andrade, senior organizing manager for the immigration advocacy group CASA de Maryland, said the Montgomery County Council should have followed up on its threat to sue the federal government over its Secure Communities program.

“We don’t believe that they have any legal authority to force local jurisdictions into their failed deportation programs,” Andrade said.