

Some will continue serving undocumented Latinos

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The director of the Department of Health of Gaston county, Collen Bridger, called on Latinos to continue coming to the Department of Health, because they will always be served, despite the commissioners' resolution ruling that undocumented immigrants should be refused service.

As Bridger explained, the ruling to cut back on public services available to undocumented people cannot be enforced due to a legal discrepancy – local and state statutes cannot override federal laws.

“According to federal law, people should be provided with medical attention regardless of their status (legal or illegal). I'm reaching out to Latinos and asking them not to be afraid; they should come to our health department, because they will always be seen,” Bridger told *La Noticia*.

“I want them to rest assured that we will not ask for their documents, nor require anything, because what we want is to help them,” Bridger explained.

She also added that the public servants of the different county departments will continue to serve undocumented peoples, and have already explained to commissioner John Torbett (who introduced the passed proposal) that they were unable to do what he had asked of them; even so, Torbett insists on implementing the resolution that was passed 15 days ago.

Bridger added that civil servants have told Torbett that in implementing this resolution, he could incur additional expenditures for the county.

“If we begin to implement the resolution, expenses will increase. They would have to do a

thorough check on every person; this would necessitate the creation of a new department, which would cost more money and time,” Bridger explained.

The same would happen within the Police Department. They would have to install a system connected to the Department of Immigration in every vehicle, in order to perform the necessary inquiry on every detained undocumented person.

This policy is the most aggressive measure taken against undocumented Latinos in the Charlotte region. According to Commissioner Torbett, he proposed the resolution in order to reduce spending on public services, which are paid for out of citizens' taxes.

Approximately 600,000 Latinos live in North Carolina; of these, 100,000 live in Charlotte, and around 10,000 in Gaston County. At least 11% receive assistance from the Department of Health. An estimated 80% are undocumented.

As far as Eneida Orama, director of the organization *Servicios Latinoamericanos*, is concerned, the first thing to do is for organizations and individuals to write to the commissioners, asking them to retract the resolution.

She added that the commissioners themselves will realize later on that the resolution will cause Gaston's economy to suffer greatly.

“These letters will apply pressure. It is also important for the residents of the county to unite. We are going to think about measures that we could take to help Gaston's Latinos,” said Orama.