

Juntos

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Good morning. My name is Juana Aparicio and I am a member of the Latino community in Philadelphia. I am also a member of JUNTOS. I come to deliver a message on problems that affect our community. The idea of convening this meeting is to make ourselves heard so that our rights may be validated. These rights are trampled upon by injustices committed against our Hispanic community. We are here to request equality, security, and protection.

The integrity of each one of us as a human being is in your hands, and for this reason I ask you to help us achieve a better quality of life without violations of our rights. I am a living example of someone who has suffered an abuse for which there has been no redress. In 2011 I had an accident in a Philadelphia street as I was leaving my job. I remember this incident as if it had happened yesterday.

As I was riding my bicycle, I collided with an American man who was riding his bicycle in the wrong direction on a one-way street. We both fell, but he got up immediately, while I continued to lie on the pavement. I was barely getting up when I suffered a second blow. The man, furious to see his bicycle destroyed, lifted it and threw it at me. This time I fell on my face, injuring my teeth and lips. I lost two teeth and cracked several more. Nevertheless, the police arrived only to say that nothing had happened, it was just an accident. The policeman asked the man for a statement, but did not request one from me. Then the policeman told the man to leave with his bike, that nothing had happened whatsoever. After that I called my family. When they arrived, the policeman told them "You have not seen anything, and you know nothing. Be quiet and don't say anything, because otherwise I'm going to take you to jail." Then the policeman took off and left us alone.

Still bleeding, I went home. Climbing the stairs to the third floor, I felt a strong headache and I realized that all of my teeth were loose. I ran to the hospital and even today I continue to receive treatment for the injuries I suffered when this man assaulted me. I am paying for treatment myself, because the Police did not do justice at the time.

You have in your hands the capacity to change the environment so that such injustices will never happen again. We in the community are human beings, here with the purpose of getting ahead and working, to have a dignified life, and certainly to give our children a better future and a better education. Each one of these, our dreams, is in your hands.

I do not know if the officer did not listen to me because I am a woman, or because I am a Latina, but in the end he did not do his job. This is only my experience, but I have seen many people in the Latino community that have had similar experiences and this is one of the reasons why people do not want to talk to the Police. It has been almost a month since we in JUNTOS held a townhall meeting on police-community relations. When we asked how many people felt confident in going to the Police District to report an abuse, out of a crowd of more than a hundred and fifty people, practically nobody raised their hand. If this level of distrust already exists in our communities, why make things worse by working in collaboration with Immigration Enforcement?

Even the Police force itself in South Philadelphia recognizes that the community isn't up to cooperating with them in crime investigation. A good example is what happened to my brother. A short time ago, he was murdered, and nobody came forward to cooperate with the Police in the investigation of the crime, because of the overwhelming fear of the Police that people feel. Fear is thwarting the process of justice and the use of ICE holds makes things worse and creates "Insecure Communities." If we want to stop abuse and fear, the first step is for the Police no longer to engage in ICE holds. Without this, the community will have no trust in the local Police. It is because of my experience and the experiences of many people in my community that I am here to ask that the City of Philadelphia stop all ICE holds. Not one more ICE hold should be enforced!

Thank you.

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