

Baltimore’s Hispanic Business Owners Call Out Mayor for Discrimination and Excessive Police Enforcement Tactics

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Baltimore, MD – “Hispanic businesses owners are being unfairly targeted by Police, Fire Marshall and Health officials for minor code violations which goes against the Mayor’s obligation and policy of equal due process and fairness,” said Miguel Palmeiro, Esq. who represents the Hispanic Business Association. “The recent show of force, intimidation, and harassment using several armed SWAT and police officers, showing up on three separate occasions over a nine day period, and shutting down a Hispanic owned bar and restaurant for alleged minor infractions, must cease immediately.”

On February 3rd, 2016, twelve armed police officers burst into La Rumba on Broadway and shut down the establishment for failing to make a payment of a minor fine. Again on February 5th, approximately twenty armed officers barged into the establishment and shut down the business because a hot water heater was not working. Then again on February 12th, fifteen armed officers ordered all patrons to leave, because they cited the ladies room lacked toilet paper in the bathroom. These unwarranted, discriminatory, and unduly aggressive police harassment tactics are categorically an abuse of power, entirely un-American, and have struck fear in the hearts of Hispanic business owners and their clientele.

La Rumba isn’t the only victim—Other Hispanic business owners have reported similar methods of abusive and discriminatory police, health, and fire marshall tactics against them during the past year. Beyond incalculable economic loss, the Hispanic community has greatly suffered by the loss in their sense of safety and security. “We are hard working citizens with families to support. For years we have established businesses in our Baltimore community, the growing Hispanic community, and we employ a lot of people. Shutting down our businesses based on fabricated and trumped up charges takes food off our families’ tables,” said Nicolas Ramos, owner of La Rumba.

Former leader and representative of both, the Maryland Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the Baltimore Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Attorney Gilberto de Jesus says, “I’m outraged at how Baltimore City has treated Hispanic merchants. Rather than working with them to identify and abate problems when such problems are first discovered, the city’s response is to shutter such businesses on Friday evenings during their most lucrative periods of operations. For a city that has experienced a net loss of businesses and population, it needs to encourage Latinos to live and work here.”

“The Hispanic Business Association calls on the Mayor to stop Police, Fire Marshall, and Health officials from draconian and excessive use of force and harassment tactics, which is destroying our vibrant and diverse Hispanic community. They should instead welcome our hard working, tax paying, Hispanic business owners and families—not drive them out of Baltimore. Our growing Hispanic-owned businesses are the heart of every community in the city and state, and it’s important for them to know they have strong partners – ones committed to their growth and success. This discriminatory and excessive use of force needs to stop now,” said Palmeiro.

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