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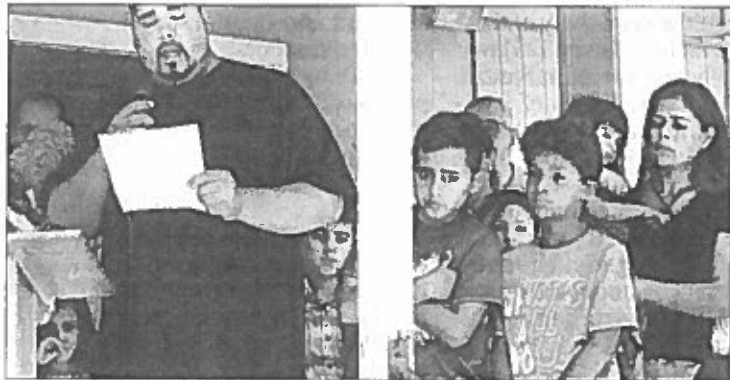
Tuesday, July 3, 2018

DAN PATRICK TO
DONATE METAL
DETECTORS TO
SCHOOLS B3

AFFIDAVIT: MAN
DEAD AFTER
SUCKER PUNCH IN
PARKING LOT B4

CONTINUING COVERAGE BASTROP DEPORTATIONS

Faith group accuses sheriff of targeting Latino neighborhood



Stony Point resident Matthew Ortega speaks Monday at a Bastrop Interfaith event to protest the sheriff's "zero tolerance" traffic enforcement operation. RALPH BARRERA / AMERICAN-STATESMAN

'Zero tolerance' traffic enforcement often led to ICE proceedings.

By Sean Collins Waish
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DEL VALLE — In the Stony Point neighborhood of Del Valle, some of the homes are brightly painted and have elaborate gardens, while others sit on cinder blocks and are sided with rotting wood. Neighbors speak to one another in Spanish, many of the men work in construction, and a tiny Catholic

church, Iglesia San Juan Diego, is nestled among the houses.

On Monday, dozens of Stony Point residents and Bastrop Interfaith organizers stood outside the church and said they felt targeted by Bastrop County Sheriff Maurice Cook's "zero tolerance" traffic enforcement operation, which led to 24 people being arrested June 23 in the area around the neighborhood. Thirteen of them were funneled into immigration proceedings.

"By this action, which appears to have been against immigrants, the sheriff has not increased peo-

ple's confidence in law enforcement, which is what we had sought," said Edie Clark, a Bastrop Interfaith leader who had talked with Cook about policing in the area before the operation. "This causes us serious concern and raises questions of credibility in that dialogue. We ask Sheriff Cook to meet with leaders of Bastrop Interfaith to develop a strategy to heal the community's broken confidence."

Cook did not respond to a request for comment Monday. Last

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Sheriff

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week he said that the operation, in which 63 people were pulled over on mostly minor traffic violations, was not designed to target immigrants but to increase the visibility of law enforcement in the area, something he said community leaders had asked for.

Cook, a Republican and former head of the Texas Rangers, said the tactic was routine police work but added that he had not ordered such an operation since taking office in January 2017.

Twenty-three of the 24 people arrested had Hispanic surnames.

The episode comes less than a year after Senate Bill 4, a state law aimed at punishing so-called sanctuary cities that decline to assist federal immigration authorities, went into effect. During the dramatic legislative debate, Republicans said the measure was needed to ensure public safety while Democrats predicted it would allow local officers to racially discriminate against Hispanics they suspect are unauthorized immigrants.

Although state and local police cannot arrest people on immigration charges, they can arrest them on others, such as not having a driver's license. Once in the county jail, they can be identified as unauthorized immigrants and picked up by U.S. Immigration and Customs



Veronica Reyes, left, and Alma Lopez, who say they have lived in the Del Valle community for a long time, decry Sheriff Maurice Cook's "zero tolerance" traffic enforcement, in which 24 people in the area were arrested and 13 of them were funneled into immigration proceedings. RALPH BARRERA / AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Enforcement.

Stony Point resident Domingo Cano, 35, said that's exactly what happened on the night of June 23.

"If they did not have licenses, they were arrested. If they had licenses, only on one occasion did the driver get a fine or warning," Cano said, adding that Cook "has seriously damaged" the relationship between Bastrop County's immigrant community and the sheriff's office, making it less likely that crime victims and witnesses will call 911 or cooperate with law enforcement.

Clark said that Bastrop Interfaith has been in contact with the sheriff's office since news of the operation

broke but has not yet met with Cook. Officials with the sheriff's office told her group his schedule is full for two weeks, she said.

Clark wants Cook to consider adopting a policy in which deputies inform the people they pull over or question that they do not have to answer local officers' questions about immigration, which is in the jurisdiction of federal law enforcement.

SB 4 bans sheriffs and police chiefs from prohibiting their officers to ask about immigration. Cook said he neither encourages nor prohibits his officers to do so.

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