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Monday, January 5, 2009 | Serving Albertville and the Sand Mountain region

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## 'Divided' city?

**By Lionel Green**

The Reporter

Published January 3, 2009

An Hispanic-American legal assistant told the Albertville City Council that the city would receive more cooperation from Latinos "if we didn't seem like two divided communities."

Aylene Sepulveda addressed the mayor and council members during a work session Monday. She works for Birmingham attorney Robert Barber, whose clientele is 95 percent Hispanic. Barber has an office in Albertville, she said.

Sepulveda expressed concern about the anti-illegal immigrant climate in the city, estimating 30 percent of Barber's Hispanic clients "are trying to get legal."

Her presentation comes after the Council approved a resolution in November asking for funding from the federal government to combat problems arising from illegal immigration, to construct a holding facility in the city, and to request an Immigration and Customs Enforcement satellite office staffed with federal agents.

"I'm Hispanic-American and just feel they really need to hear from the Hispanic community," Sepulveda said. "There hasn't been a positive presentation to that point, I don't think.

"I thought the response was relatively positive. Randy Amos has been supportive so far and encouraged me to come."

Sepulveda explained the process to become legal is painstakingly slow, noting U.S. government officials are now processing applications submitted in 1992. She said the U.S. government is "overwhelmed with applications, according to our attorney."

"So not everybody falls in that category of 100 percent illegal," she said.

Mayor Lindsey Lyons said he was impressed with Sepulveda's presentation and sympathized with Hispanics stalled in the arduous citizenship process.

"But we're still firmly committed with all the above," said Lyons, referring to the three initiatives in the November resolution.

Sepulveda said Albertville is different because of its large Guatemalan community. Many don't speak Spanish, meaning that even interpreters are sometimes limited when trying to bridge the communication gap.

"That presents several challenges," she said. "There are more than 50 dialects in Guatemala. Their education is very, very low. Most don't go to school. And Guatemala is very corrupt, so they're coming here with an attitude that's not as open and accommodating to our way of life here."

Sepulveda thanked police Chief Benny Womack for publicly acknowledging the Hispanic community's help in shutting down a brothel last month.

"They do care and do want to make a change and do want to be legal," she said.

Sepulveda talked about the violent and corrupt culture in parts of Mexico, where drug "cartels are killing people every day."

She said even legal immigrants are "timid" to get involved here because of an inherent distrust of law enforcement and a fear for family members who may be illegal aliens.

One of the chief complaints by Albertville residents is the drain on taxpayer-funded resources, like Medicaid, food stamps and the county hospitals.

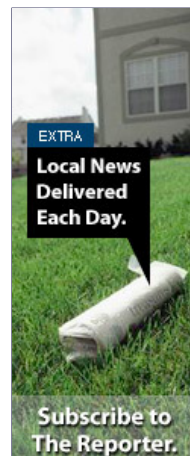
Sepulveda said they are valid issues but are a reflection of the system's shortcomings, not the mothers who are trying to take care of their children.

"Who they need to be addressing is the Department of Human Resources and other agencies and writing to their congressmen," she said. "Who are these social workers and who are these people allowing this to happen?"

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