

FEATURED

Nonprofits join forces to quell fears, help immigrants plan for future

By CONNIE CONNOLLY cconnolly@chespub.com 11 hrs ago



PHOTO BY CONNIE CONNOLLY

From left, Matt Peters, director of the Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center, attorney Derek Hills, and Sandy Brown, executive director of Mid-Shore Pro Bono met on March 14 to develop a plan to help provide factual information and legal help to local undocumented immigrants.

EASTON — Fear and panic generated by the media, Facebook postings and foreign embassies have prompted two Easton nonprofits to join forces and create a plan to help undocumented immigrants in the Mid-Shore area access factual information and free legal help.

Sandy Brown, executive director of Mid-Shore Pro Bono, and Matthew Peters, director of the Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center, met on Tuesday, March 14, to continue planning how to help undocumented immigrant parents make contingency plans for their U.S. citizen children.

Besides the dissemination of false information, language barriers and self-imposed insulation, well-intentioned do-gooders and exploitative frauds add to the multiple challenges Brown and Peters face in helping the rural immigrant population in the five Mid-Shore counties confront the possibility of deportation.

"We can't stop deportations, and we can't change the law — nor should we," Peters said. "We're not advocating breaking the law. We're trying to make sure the family is protected during the process."

The two nonprofit organizations partnered to create a program designed to offer reliable, accurate and trustworthy information to the area's immigrant community at no cost.

"Contingency Planning for Maryland Families Facing Immigration Enforcement" has been formed to properly advise resident Maryland families facing potential family separation and create caregiving plans for their children.

"Maryland's laws are different and unique when it comes to planning for children in the event of family separation because of ICE enforcement activities," the joint statement said. "Documents that are effective in other states and other countries might not be useful in Maryland, particularly for those trying to designate caregivers for their children in school and health care matters."

Well-intentioned churches and individuals are printing out power of attorney documents from the internet to give to undocumented immigrants.

"In some cases, they are putting families in direct danger," Peters said. "It's spinning out of control. They're trying to help, but they're reacting in fear."

Peters said that immigrants need to know their rights, put a plan into action and sit down with a lawyer.



Bilingual staff at Mid-Shore Pro Bono will conduct intake interviews, craft contingency plans, take actions to implement the family plan and schedule a free half-hour consultation with a pro bono family attorney.

"At this point, it isn't an immigration matter," Brown said. "We're providing an opportunity for free counseling from a trusted volunteer attorney."

Volunteer attorneys will consider and advise clients about powers of attorney, custody, guardianship, and kinship care documents for clients if needed.

Members of the community who are willing to assist should call Mid-Shore Pro Bono or the Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center to learn more about appropriate remedies.

Appointments can be made with either Mid-Shore Pro Bono or the Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center Monday through Friday to begin the intake process. Individuals can call 443-786-1120 or 443-298-9425 (Spanish) or 410-690-8128 (English) for additional information.