

ResiStat Meeting for Portuguese Speakers in Somerville

March 1, 2008

City Officials Present:

M. Teresa Cardoso, Ward 2 School Committee Representative
Capt. John O'Connor, Somerville Police
Sgt. Rico Isidoro, Somerville Police
Simone Braga, Facilitator and Parent Liaison for SPS Parent Information Center.
Regina Bertholdo, Director, SPS Parent Information Center
Ethan Field, ResiStat Analyst
Hai Tiet, Junior SomerStat Analyst

Other community organizations represented included:

Paulo Pinto, Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers
Tito Meza, Somerville Community Development Corporation
Regina Bertholdo, Brazilian Women's Group
Mary Lu Mendonça, former Somerville Human Rights Commissioner
Reporters from the *Brazilian Times*

Resident Comments:

Appreciation:

- A resident said that she'd heard good things about Police in Somerville from people in other communities. She said the Somerville Police have a reputation for not being harsh on immigrants.

Immigration and Documentation:

- Residents said that many people in the Brazilian community are afraid to call the Police about crimes in their neighborhood, or about domestic violence, because they are worried that the Police will find out that they are undocumented, and will arrest them.
- Capt. O'Connor assured residents that this is absolutely not true. Somerville Police will never ask someone who is reporting a crime to show documentation. Capt. O'Connor also said he knew of stories in which people from within immigrant communities were blackmailing other immigrants by threatening to report their immigration status. Again, Somerville Police will not report any otherwise law-abiding resident to U.S. Immigration.

Census Data:

- Residents said that US Census data for Somerville is not very useful, because country of origin is much more important in Somerville than race. Brazilians can be appear on the Census as White, Black or Hispanic, so it's hard to find real information about them. These residents suggested the City should track that data.
- Residents said they thought the Census data likely under-reports immigrant populations. They said that there might be ten people living in a house that only officially lists five people. Residents asked, "If we list more people on our census forms than we can legally have in an apartment, will the Inspectional Services Department come after us?" *Update:* Census and Inspectional Staff say that reporting on the census forms that more people are living in a house than can legally occupy it would *not* automatically trigger an inspection. However, because that information is public

record, if there were a complaint, the census information could potentially be used against the occupants.

Paths to Citizenship:

- A resident said they wanted to make sure they were paying their income taxes, because they wanted to contribute to the community, and they had heard that it increases the likelihood of obtaining U.S. Citizenship.
- Paulo Pinto of the Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers responded that MAPS has resources on how to get a tax ID number. Pinto also mentioned that MAPS had assisted over 1000 Portuguese speakers successfully apply for US Citizenship in 2007. Contact MAPS at <http://www.maps-inc.org/> or 617-864-7600.

Police Reorganization and Public Relations:

- A resident suggested that Portuguese speakers may be hesitant to come out to a meeting like this. It might be better to have the meeting at a church, or at MAPS.
- Another resident said that if there are going to be many more Somerville Police on the streets in the fall, some undocumented immigrants may be afraid that the Police are looking for them for immigration reasons. This resident recommended that before the new officers start work, the City should run an article in the Portuguese newspapers letting immigrants know about the reorganization, and that the new Police are there to help reduce crime, not to deport anyone. Reporters from the Brazilian Times said they would be interested in running such a story.
- A resident said that her daughter feels safe with the Police because of a school field trip to the Police Station. She said that children can bring these positive attitudes home to their parents. She recommended that programs like that continue.

Communications and 311

- A resident reported that she got a \$100 ticket during the last snow emergency because she only has a cell phone, and wouldn't understand an automatic phone call in English well anyway. This resident and others strongly suggested that the City enable residents to sign up for automated Connect-CTY phone calls in specific languages, and then deliver snow emergency information in those languages.
- A resident said she had called the Police about teenagers who were loitering near the railroad tracks. She said she knows it's the MBTA's property, but that she should be able to call the City and the City should pass her comments along to the appropriate people.

Next Steps for City Staff:

- Publicize "City of Hope" resolution in non-English press, and encourage people to report crime without worrying about their documentation status.
- Investigate the possibility of asking for nationality of origin in the City Census.
- Try to have the next meeting of this kind in a place where people from the Portuguese-speaking community are already meeting, such as a church, or MAPS.
- Promote the Police reorganization in the non-English press before it is implemented, to reassure residents that the Police are not there to look for undocumented residents.
- Investigate the possibility of designating phone numbers as Portuguese (or other languages) in the 311 database, and of placing automated phone calls to those numbers in that language.