

Role of police in

RESOURCE OFFICERS IN SPOTLIGHT

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A program that puts police officers in schools is intended to strengthen ties with students, staff and their communities while allaying security concerns.

But the reach of school resource officers, as they are called, has become the focus of heightened concerns, particularly in Suffolk County, as published reports indicate that information-sharing about alleged gang affiliation has put some immigrant students on the road to deportation.

Amid backlash caused by the 2017 detention and 2018 deportation to Honduras of a former student at Huntington High School, the Suffolk County Police Department on Tuesday defended the role those officers play in safeguarding schools, improving community relations and helping students.

In the view of Suffolk Police Commissioner Geraldine Hart, the program needs to continue and grow.

"I can say unequivocally that our school resource officer program is a huge, huge part of our bridge-building with our communities," Hart said.

She said the characterization of those officers as information-gatherers for immigration enforcement is "an extraordinary misrepresentation." They are in the schools, she added, to address myriad issues and foster a safe environment for all students.

A Dec. 27 story in The New York Times Magazine, published in collaboration with ProPub-



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lica, reported that the former Huntington High School student was suspended from school and eventually arrested and detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement after he was questioned in school about alleged gang-related actions, such as writing the Honduran telephone country code "504" on a calculator case, wearing blue sneakers and drawing a "devil with horns."

The Huntington case resulted from "substantiated information" that was considered by an immigration judge and reaffirmed on appeal, Hart said. "It was not any doodle, or any mascot drawing . . . that led to the deportation," she said.

The commissioner plans to meet "in the near future" with superintendents from throughout the county to discuss the program as educators wrestle with the matter. The Nassau County Police Department also employs school resource offi-

cers, but its program has not attracted as much scrutiny for immigration cases.

Several hundred school district residents attended a Monday night meeting in Huntington, with many pressing for specific guidelines to limit the program's scope.

Immigrant activists have been complaining about the dangers of entanglement of law enforcement and schools since the summer of 2017, soon after the launch of Operation Mator — an initiative of the federal Homeland Security Investigations, which operates under ICE to pursue gang members for removal from the country. The push followed a burst of violence by alleged members of the MS-13 gang, but advocates contend immigrant teens were wrongly accused of gang ties.

"They're basically targeting Latino immigrant students," said Osman Canales, a community organizer with the Long Island

Immigrant Student Advocates. "The schools need rules, procedures and limits on their relations with the police and what information is being stored. It's not only in Huntington."

Irma Solis, director of the Suffolk County Chapter of the New York Civil Liberties Union, also has called for strict limits to officers' information-gathering and for "restricting the sharing of information directly or indirectly with immigration enforcement."

Despite those concerns, school resource officers have been touted as a vital link between police and schools on Long Island, especially with reassessment of response to threats following the February 2018 school shooting that killed 17 students and staff in Parkland, Florida.

"We found tremendous benefit in the training and experience those officers have . . . and we feel not only that the continua-

tion, but the extension of the program is essential," said Elwood schools Superintendent Kenneth Bossert, president of the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association.

The concerns of immigrant students are on the minds of educators as well, he said.

Bossert stated that "information-sharing should only take place as pertinent to maintaining the safety, health and welfare of students, faculty and staff." He added: "I don't believe a student's citizenship or immigration status is a definition of a safety concern."

Hart said procedures for school resource officers were tightened in September 2017 so that any intelligence gathered "will be reviewed by a second set of eyes" — a commanding officer in the department's Homeland Security section— before a decision to share it is made.

With Nicole Fuller,
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schools

Community wants answers on student deportation

BY CRAIG SCHNEIDER
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Dozens of Long Islanders turned out Tuesday to question Suffolk police officials about what role a school resource officer played in the deportation of a Huntington High School student.

The crowd of more than 50 people at the monthly community meeting at the Second Precinct in Huntington aired their concerns about the handling of the student. The deportation came to light in an account in *The New York Times Magazine*, posted online in late December.

The student was arrested in June 2017 by federal immigration officials after he was questioned by the school resource officer and the principal about his alleged gang activities, according to the account. Identified only as "Alex," the boy was sent back to his native Honduras, the story said.

The police department "is satisfied that the proper procedures were followed," a public information officer said in an email. The Huntington

School District is reviewing its relationship with the department.

At the community meeting, many said they believed the process had identified the student as a gang member without thoroughly investigating him.

"We feel he was innocent and denied due process," said Cheryl Lynn Blum, of Huntington Station.

The handling of the student has created a rift between the police and the school, many in the room said.

"The students feel [the officer] has ratted out their friend," said Sandy Saginaw of Huntington. "There needs to be some healing."

The school resource officer, Andrew Fiorillo, is one of five such officers in the Second Precinct, said Insp. Bill Scrima, the precinct's commanding officer.

Fiorillo has been in the schools for about 14 years and is well-liked and respected by students and teachers, Scrima said.

"Kids come up to him, hug him," Scrima said. "That said, he has a job to do."

The school resource officer is still on the job but is no longer at Huntington High, he said.

"If we're welcome, we go; if we're not, we don't," Scrima said of the officers' placement.

Several residents asked Scrima to describe the process for identifying a student as a gang member and the level of communication between the police department and federal immigration officials.

A student, he said, is identified as a suspected gang member after evidence is collected that establishes possible ties between the student and a gang. The evidence could include writings, drawings or wearing the colors of a gang, as well as statements from students or school staff members, he said.

The student's name is entered into a police database, Scrima said. The student's parents may be notified if officials think they can play a role in turning around their child, he said.

Matt Harris of Huntington Station, took issue with how the magazine account painted Huntington High School.

"This article made the school look like a really awful, gang-infested place," he said. "That's ridiculous."

The story was written by a reporter with the nonprofit news organization ProPublica, did not respond to a request for comment Tuesday. Last week, in a statement, ProPublica president Richard Tofel said, "With respect to the story, the school district has not indicated that there are any inaccuracies at all, and we are aware of none."

At a Huntington school board meeting Monday night, hundreds showed up to talk about the magazine account.

Huntington High Principal Brenden Cusack described the account as a misrepresentation of him and the school, saying, "The story as published is not the whole story."

Jurors listen in on 'El Chapo'

BY JOHN RILEY
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An FBI agent on Tuesday described the cloak-and-dagger undercover operation that penetrated Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán's encrypted phone network at his Brooklyn federal court trial as prosecutors played never before heard recordings of the accused cocaine kingpin talking to lackeys, customers and sicarios.

Jurors in the two-month-old trial also saw a video of Guzmán dressed in his trademark baseball cap strutting around a man tied to a pole during an interrogation, and heard the alleged drug lord try to calm one of his enforcers in the midst of fighting with police and another network over a Mexican town.

"Once you have him tied up and such, we'll check it out to make sure so we don't execute innocent people," Guzmán told his sicario, Spanish for hitman, a henchman identified as "Cholo Iván," in one of the calls.

"You taught us to be a wolf, acting like a wolf," Cholo Iván answered his boss. "I'm remembering, and that is how I like to do it."

Guzmán, 58, the legendary accused head of the Sinaloa cartel who twice escaped Mexican prisons, was extradited to the United States in 2017 and has been on trial since November on charges that he used violence and corruption to control a drug empire that smuggled \$14 billion in cocaine into the United States over 25 years.

Nine informants have appeared so far at a trial expected to extend into February, and some of their testimony has included selective recorded calls with Guzmán. But more than a dozen recordings from 2011 played Tuesday provided jurors their most extended exposure to his high-octave voice as he conducted business.

FBI cybercrime agent Stephen Marston said the recordings stemmed from a probe of Cristian Rodríguez, a baby-faced Colombian tech expert who built an encrypted

voice-over-internet communication system for one of the cartel's Colombian drug suppliers that was adopted by Guzmán and stymied FBI experts.

Eventually, Marston said, undercover agents met Rodríguez in a New York hotel room, posing as mobsters interested in buying encryption products. But in 2011, still unable to crack his codes, Marston said, they persuaded him to "proactively cooperate" at a clandestine meeting in Colombia.

"Without the insider access, we were not going to get in," he said.

Rodríguez persuaded his employers to move the network's server from Canada to the Netherlands — which put it in a jurisdiction willing to grant warrants to seize the calls, gave Rodríguez access to create new encryption keys that he could share with the FBI, and allowed him to insert software that would automatically copy all calls and move them to an FBI-controlled server.

Marston said in 2011 and early 2012, authorities milked the network for intelligence from about 1,500 calls — including 100 to 200 involving Guzmán, identified by internal references to "Chapo" or "Joaquín," for comparison with his distinctive voice on known samples like a *Rolling Stone* interview and the interrogation video posted on YouTube.

"In general," the agent said, "it has a higher pitch, has kind of a sing songy nature, and I pick up kind of a nasally undertone."

In excerpts played in court — Spanish, with English transcripts — prosecutors focused on passages showing Guzmán's leadership role, giving orders and inspiring deference, with honorifics like "señor" or "sir," which is an element of the charge that he ran a continuing criminal enterprise.

While the government offered no context, the passages also provided glimpses of the daily business dealings of an accused drug lord.

Testimony at the trial resumes on Wednesday.



Suffolk County Police Inspector William Scrima speaks Tuesday at a community meeting at the Second Police Precinct in Huntington.