

## ACLU

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points the department held during the 12-month period the ACLU requested records for "excessive," said the checkpoints are being staged almost exclusively in areas that are predominantly black and Hispanic.

"Racial disparities are occurring when the police set up these checkpoints," Pinto told the handful of people in attendance at the meeting. "...If you live in a neighborhood that is 61 percent or more minority, you are 17.8 times more likely to see a checkpoint than a white neighborhood."

The Police Department has denied that its checkpoints target minorities.

Pinto said the ACLU doesn't want a lawsuit, only a suitable resolution to the conflict, but the organization will sue if no resolution can be amicably reached.

"The overall goal of the ACLU is to bring about change in what's going on and how it can be done," he stated. "...We're trying to be as open and as reasonable as possible with the police department, as a way of saying, 'Look, this is how you

can make this better for the community.'"

Others in attendance weren't so willing to settle for an out-of-court resolution. S. Wayne Patterson, a civil rights attorney and president of the local NAACP, said he wants to try the case in hopes that its outcome could establish restrictions on the implementation of checkpoints that do not currently exist in the state.

"The goal is to set precedent. Precedent is far more important than damages," declared the city native. "If we can set a precedent here in Winston-Salem, it will set precedent throughout the state, and hopefully across the Southeast."

E. Clarke Dummit of the Dummit Law Firm said he has spent over 15 years fighting stationary license checkpoints in court. He implored those present to take advantage of the opportunity to attack the issue as a community.

"The work you've done here is incredible. We need to litigate," Dummit declared. "...When the community's doing it, it puts a lot more pressure on the Court of Appeals. It takes this kind of audience and this kind of



Attorney E. Clarke Dummit speaks.

Photos by Layla Farmer

community involvement to get the Court of Appeals to say, 'that's wrong.'"

Dummit went on to say that the checkpoints, which are known to affect undocumented drivers the most adversely, wouldn't be necessary had it not been for a 2006 law that made it illegal for undocumented residents to obtain drivers licenses or insurance.

"We legislated it so people could not get a license

and could not get insurance," he stated. "We created this problem."

Elbia Altamirez has pledged to help galvanize the Hispanic community around the issue and encourage those affected by the checkpoints to speak out. A community health educator for the last three years, Altamirez says she has seen firsthand the devastating effects the licensing laws and the frequent traffic stops that

often ensnare unlicensed drivers can have.

"I see that happen every day," the Nicaragua native said of unlicensed drivers being ticketed, fined or retained. "They lose their jobs because they are not able to get to their jobs. They become homeless. It is a common problem that is happening in the community."

Patterson said trying the case would be an opportunity for the city to lead the charge in forging practices that don't disproportionately impact one group.

"Just like North Carolina established a precedent in 2006 with the license laws, now we need to set a precedent in a positive way," he said.

Mayor Pro Tempore Vivian Burke said she has received good feedback about the frequent police presence in minority communities, and that some report feeling safer with more police around.

"Some people don't see it in a negative way. They see it in a positive way," she said. "They really are happy to see the police, no matter what reason they are here for."

The city's Public Safety Committee is slated to exam-



Elbia Altamirez

ine the issue during its meeting on Feb. 13. Burke, who chairs the committee, urged all those who have strong opinions about the subject to come out and let their voices be heard.

"When we have this meeting, we're asking everyone to come," she said. "If they have concerns, we want to hear from them. We need to see them. That's why we're having this open, public meeting."

The Public Safety Committee meeting will be held on Monday at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall, 101 N. Main Street. For more information, call City Link, 727-8000 or 311.

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