

APD officers question student following false 911 call

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Late morning on Thursday, Sept. 22, Kathy Zamora, a Cal Poly Humboldt student, arrived at Fuente Nueva Charter School's parking lot to enjoy her lunch before beginning her internship. During this time, children were out and school continued as usual. Zamora noticed a Arcata Police Department car parked behind her. After turning around to get a better look, police began approaching the vehicle. Desperate for a witness, she called her friend. "Hang-up the phone," the officer said to Zamora three times. She complied with the officer's demand out of fear and confusion. The officer told her to get out of the vehicle with her hands up. The officer then began to question her aggressively, "where is the man?" to which she didn't know what they were talking about.

"I didn't know what to do. It felt as if I didn't have any rights," said Zamora.

Once out of the car with her hands up, the officers on scene ordered Zamora to turn around and lift up her shirt. That day she was wearing a crop top and a mesh shirt. With her shirt lifted, she was then told to face

the officers.

“They could clearly see that there was nothing on me and still made me do that,” said Zamora.

Two more officers arrived and began to search her car. Zamora asked the officers why they were conducting the search and for their names, to which no answers were given besides that they got a call. There were six officers present during the search and questioning. After police concluded their procedure, Zamora was left with a business card and emotional trauma.

“This made me feel helpless, violated and embarrassed,” said Zamora about the experience.

When she entered the school, Zamora told her experience to the first person she came across, Beth Wylie-- Charter Director at Fuente Nueva--who then emailed the rest of the staff. “This is not any easy email to write,” she started off, “the Arcata Police department has once again provided a disappointing response to a situation on campus.”

Wylie continued, “The police department failed to notify us that they were on campus while they searched the parking lot for a threat. They have to do better. I have written down my experience and have asked for a meeting with the Chief of Police Brian Ahearn.”

Meeting at Fuente Nueva

Zamora reached out to El Leñador to join her in this meeting on Sept. 27 at Fuente Nueva, as well as Debbi Gonzalez, assistant professor at the Department of Social Work at CPH. Marisol Ruiz, associate professor at the School of Education at CPH. Sharrone Blanck, from NAACP chapter in Eureka, and her friend Jennifer Diaz, CPH student. Representing CPH’s Provost (Senior Administrative Officer), Kimberly White, Interim Associate Vice President of Faculty Affairs.

Zamora recounted the events of that day and afterwards, she asked APD Chief of Police Brian Ahearn what is going to happen now, “I’m here because Beth asked me to be here,” and he’s really there to “listen and answer questions.”

According to Ahearn, the make and model of Zamora’s car matches the description of an armed, older man who was reported to the police earlier. The individual was arrested later that day.

Ahearn assured Ruiz that Kathy’s treatment was standard procedure.

“Even having to pull up your shirt?” Ruiz followed up.

“Yes,” replied the Chief.

Ruiz asked, “Why wasn’t the school [Fuente Nueva] notified about the 911 call?” Ahearn replied, “That this is an issue they are working on.”

When Ruiz asked about what kind of action APD is going to take, Ahearn said, “That’s up to Kathy if she wants to file a report.”

Zamora asked why the officers on scene didn't give their names when asked. Ahearn explained, "If officers are asked for their names they must be given."

Wylie asked about whether there would be accountability on what had occurred. Ahearn said, "It is my responsibility we communicate correctly."

Ruiz asked if searching the car was procedure. Ahearn said, "Yes, based on the nature of the call." When asked if the car would still be searched, even if it didn't match the description from the 911 call, Ahearn replied, "Yes, still."

Discussed was the trauma Zamora endured, as well as its impact on her education. White said, "Administration is here to support you and are happy to talk about school resources ... think about your healing steps, what does that look like to you."

At one point in the meeting Wylie asks Zamora how she feels to-which she said, "I don't feel ok to be on campus [Fuente Nueva], I know I'm not the first person to be profiled in Humboldt County. People like me are going to be profiled and I'm tired of seeing that being repeated. Y'all [APD] have to listen. I am not the first. There are people who have experienced what I have experienced and feel like they can't speak up. I am here for the kids, that's what I'm here for."

After the meeting concluded, Zamora was not happy and was disappointed about how Aheran conducted himself during it. She felt that he gave the impression of not wanting to be there.

Zamora said that she will file a complaint against APD and see what further steps need to be taken.

Cal Poly Humboldt email to campus

On the day of the meeting, CPH sent out an email stating that they are working with Zamora by giving her support and looking into what occurred on Sept. 22. After the meeting, El Leñador asked Zamora what she thought about the email. "They (CPH) did not let me know that this was going to be written and released," she said. "I am not mad that this was released but that is my story to tell and I am willing to share that story if they ask."

Within the email, CPH continued, "The student contacted University officials yesterday to report the situation and to request specific types of support and engagement." According to Zamora, this is false. "I have never contacted University officials, the only person I have been in contact is my social work supervisor/professor," she said. "She's the one who filed it. She is the one that reported it to CARES."

Zamora questioned the purpose of the email, she said, "Why didn't they contact me? That to me has me thinking, what are your [CPH] intentions?"

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