

The METROWEST DAILY NEWS

MetroWest rallies decry separation of children

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Young and old attended rallies in Framingham and Milford on Saturday, calling for an end to President Trump's immigration policy.

MetroWest sent a clear message on Saturday to President Trump – it's wrong to separate children from their families.

At rallies held in Framingham and Milford that coincided with nationwide protests, residents held homemade signs, like “Keep Families Together” and “Immigrants Make America Great.”

They listened to speakers who criticized the Trump administration for splitting families apart as they attempt to cross the southern border from Mexico.

Hundreds attended the Framingham rally in front of the Memorial Building downtown. A smaller crowd of more than a dozen stood on the steps of Milford Town Hall.

The oldest attendee at the Framingham rally may have been 100-year old Elizabeth McArthur. Sitting in a chair minutes before the rally started, McArthur, who lives in Framingham, told a story that she believes captures the danger of Trump’s immigration policy.

In 1962, McArthur and her late husband, Harvey, visited Germany. It was a year after the Berlin Wall went up, and McArthur remembers a father on one side of the wall, standing on a roof, desperately trying to communicate with his family on the other side.

McArthur remembers a person in her party saying, "That's communism. We could never see that in our country."

"Well, we have it in Arizona and Texas," McArthur said, referring to border crossings that resulted in more than 2,000 children separated by U.S. Border Patrol agents, and government agencies, and placed in detention facilities.

"Trump is a Hitler and a Stalin. He's got to go, and his whole bunch," McArthur added.

The Framingham Chapter of Families Belong Together organized Saturday's rally. Activist Nicole Doak helped pull it all together.

“Shameful” and “inhumane” are the words Doak used to describe the separation of children from their families at the southern border.

“We’re a much better nation than that,” Doak said.

Framingham Mayor Yvonne Spicer said, “What is happening in this country must stop.”

Middlesex District Attorney Marian Ryan commented, “This isn’t about immigration policy. It’s about the fate of each one of these children.”

Ruby Alberti, 13, of Framingham, listened to the speakers with her 10-year old brother Lorenzo and mother, Karen. “It’s horrible, kids my age, and younger, taken away from their families,” Ruby said while holding a sign with the words “Love Wins.”

“It’s not right,” Lorenzo added. “(Trump) shouldn’t be able to do that. I don’t want him to be president anymore.”

Doak attributed what appeared to be a small representation of Framingham's immigrant community at Saturday's rally to fear of possible attendance by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. Organizers reached out to the immigrant community through social media, emails and flyers, Doak said.

"If immigrants drive by today's rally, they will see all these people that support them. We have a voice, and we will use it on their behalf," Doak said.

Framingham needs to do more work to reach out to its immigrant community, District 9 City Councilor Edgardo Torres told the Daily News. Torres spoke at Saturday's rally.

"We need to show more support for the immigrant community," Torres said. "We need to show we're there for them, and we're in full support of them."

In Milford, local clergy gathered with residents on the steps of Town Hall to offer prayers and a call for what Rev. Tony Lorenzen of Hopedale Unitarian Parish called a move toward “respect, inclusion, compassion and justice.”

Eva Steinhardt, 59, of Franklin, cried as she told the story of her immigrant parents, who separately escaped the Hungarian Revolution in the 1950s, and settled in America.

“People are coming to America for a better life, not to commit crimes,” Steinhardt said. “There’s no empathy, compassion (in the Trump administration). It’s so cold to use children for (Trump’s) authoritarian ideas.”

Bryan Cole, 33, of Milford, handed out buttons with the words “We Care, We Vote, Do You”. He and his wife are expecting a daughter.

“I want a town, and a country, that our daughter can grow up in that she will be proud of,” Cole said.

Minutes after the rally started, Cole said he was disappointed Milford selectmen were nowhere to be seen.

“Milford has a large immigrant population, and given (Trump’s) hateful rhetoric, selectmen should be here representing the entire community,” he said.

Seated in a chair at the Framingham rally, McArthur said she believes she has the wisdom in her 100 years to solve the immigration crisis.

“Republican leaders have to let their minds be open, admit they’re not right, and find a good Republican to replace Trump,” McArthur said.

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