

Local enforcement of fed's immigration law weakens public safety

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CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

A hairline crack in the windshield of my sister's car turned our family's world upside down in 2010. On their way home from the store to celebrate my nephew's birthday, my sister was stopped by police two blocks from home. In the passenger seat was her husband with a birthday cake in his lap and three of their children were in the backseat.

For years, they had lived cautiously in the shadows and practiced what they would do if they were pulled over or stopped by the police. They talked about how they would know their rights, remain silent, and not answer any questions about immigration status. But all that rehearsal was useless when the police threatened to detain my sister and kids as well for not answering about my brother-in-law's immigration status.

Out of fear for harm against his family, he admitted he was undocumented and the police dragged him out of the car and took him away.

I couldn't find the words to explain to my nieces and nephews why "the superheroes" stole their Daddy and took him away. How does one even begin to explain deportation and immigration process and laws to a 5-year-old?

Like so many other communities throughout the United States, when police begin to enforce federal immigration law, a severe disconnection and distrust for local law enforcement immediately ensues. This is

because far too often, the implementation of such collaborations results in high levels of illegal racial profiling by police and pre-textual arrests to target people who they think are without proper immigration papers. As a result, people, including families with children and whole communities lose their trust in the public safety system's ability to keep people safe and prevent crime. People become fearful of police. People become less likely to report incidences of crime or seek help in emergency situations, including acts of domestic violence. People are less likely to come forward as witnesses of crime. Sadly, public safety becomes compromised rather than strengthened. In many instances, this is further compounded when survivors of crime are turned away from accessing emergency services due to lack of program funding because county and state resources are being prioritized on things that don't work.

In Multnomah County, the collaboration between police and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is just as devastating as it is anywhere else in the country. The implications of this magnitude mirror the damaging and rippling effects seen at the national level: broken families, broken communities, and a broken public safety system; all of which have not made us any safer. At a time with limited resources, school closures, and the eroding of our social safety net, taxpayer dollars are not being prioritized, and scarce law enforcement resources are being diverted away from strategies that are proven to reduce and prevent crime.

Approximately 36 counties in Oregon collaborate with ICE, but Multnomah County would be the first to set a precedent for policy on detainer ("hold") requests from

ICE. These detainer requests are part of an immigration screening process where a high priority "hold" is placed on people who pose a threat to public safety. It is not a mandatory requirement and is problematic for a variety of reasons. Primarily, it undermines a person's constitutional rights to due process and deprives people of their dignity. In addition, research from the University of California Berkeley School of Law found that "... of the ICE detainers issued pursuant to the program, only two percent were for felony cases, while the other 98 percent were for misdemeanor cases." This clearly demonstrates that such programs incentivize racial profiling as a means to arrest people to check their immigration statuses. Further, despite the flaws in many of these programs throughout the United States, such collaborations continue to drain local resources at the cost of precious community resources. If anything, Multnomah County could serve as a model for other counties of how to effectively draw the line between local law enforcement and federal immigration authority. ICE's hold on Multnomah County blurs that line and destroys that confidence.

It is no secret that our state and local counties have limited resources to fund proven and effective strategies for creating safe, strong and healthy communities. In fact, we see it every day as schools lay off teachers and cries for basic access to health, housing and human services go unheard. In these tough economic times, it's more important than ever to focus on prioritizing precious tax dollars to prevent crime, not use scarce public safety resources to enforce federal immigration law.

PARTNERSHIP FOR SAFETY and JUSTICE

Cassandra Villanueva is the director of Organizing and Advocacy with the Partnership for Safety and Justice. PSJ is a statewide, non-profit advocacy organization dedicated to making Oregon's approach to crime and public safety more effective and just.

In Evening, Then You

By Kareem Ali

Blue emeralds
And yellow goldenrod rolling in
And Etruscan horses
Simmering into a juniper of wind.

Circling over Alexandria
You picture Florence
Or Tuscany opening up the sea to a ray of light.

Yet even from this extreme distance
Your lips
Rose like a flesh of thought
Circling and plunging,
Then circling again
Into a sphere of drunken hummingbirds—singing.



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