

ACT network works to change police, ICE collusion policy

BY ANDREW VALDERAMA
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

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Coalition of
Communities of
Color

Formed in 2001, the Coalition of Communities of Color (CCC) is an alliance of culturally specific community-based organizations with representatives from six communities of color: African, African American, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino, Native American and Slavic. Representation on the CCC is determined by individual communities, and all decisions are based on consensus.

"On August 12th, 2012 they arrested me around 2 a.m.," the day laborer says. "I think they arrested me simply because they noticed I was Latino, but they wrote down it was for littering. The police officer told me I was being arrested but didn't give me the reason. I was arrested in Gresham, which is in Multnomah County, and was taken to a

jail in Hillsboro, which is in Washington County. I was in jail for more than 48 hours, after which ICE agents finally arrived and took me to Tacoma

where I was held for one month. When I was there I saw several people detained, many for a long time, who still were completely uncertain of their futures or if they would ever experience freedom again. I also saw some who fought their cases, some of which are still fighting them to this day and some of which voluntarily sign deportation paperwork and are deported immediately."

This Portland area day laborer has been an active leader at the MLK Jr. Worker Center, operated by 501(c)(3) Voz Workers' Rights Education Project. This worker, who wishes to remain anonymous, was vice president of the Day Laborer Committee (one of two committees that comprise the organization's board of directors) in 2011 and is a resident of Gresham. He has also participated in leadership opportunities such as our vocational skills trainings and monthly Leadership School. This Portland area day laborer specializes in landscaping and carpentry work.

"My arrest upsets me because they didn't arrest me to deport me. I thought I would have to pay a fee or do community service but that was not the case for me. I have been in this country for the past 15 years and it is not just that they deport me. My case is still pending. I have already been to two hearings, but my future is uncertain in this country."

Impact on police, ICE collaborations in our communities

Local police have become a primary gateway to deportation which seriously threatens our public safety and civil rights. Police can get distracted from their primary functions, resources can get diverted, and trust with immigrant communities is broken when local police forces collaborate with ICE. Without trust, crimes go unreported, investigations go unsolved, decades of community policing efforts are destroyed, and we are all less safe. As in the testimony above illustrates, families are not only torn apart through this collaboration, but the pursuit of the American Dream becomes a

path towards the criminalization of immigrants.

"Oregon law makes it clear that local governments are not to be involved in immigration enforcement," Multnomah County Chair Jeff Cogen said. "This is because for local governments to be successful in carrying out their mission of protecting public safety and providing health and human services, we need to have good, strong, trusting relationships with the community. And immigration law in particular, because of the threat of forcible deportation, is very likely to cause fear in communities."

The collaboration between Multnomah County and ICE has existed since May 18, 2010. In Portland we see new cases every week of families being torn apart because of deportations for jay walking, not being able to pay MAX fares, and even simply showing up for work. What's more, we see in our Portland community a growing distrust in an agency meant to protect and serve us. As a direct result, cases of domestic violence and other health-related situations are going unreported. Our communities are suffering.

Voz Workers' Rights Education Project

In 1996, the Workers' Organizing Committee formed in response to repressive tactics by immigration officials and local police that discouraged day laborers from seeking work on the corners of 2 major intersections in Portland. As day laborers began to organize, they found they shared common incidences of exploitation, wage theft, and homelessness. A plan emerged approved by the City of Portland in 2006 that included the establishment of a worker center as part of the solution towards community equity and safety. The Martin Luther King Jr. Worker Center was then established in 2008, which has since connected hundreds of workers a month with local employers and jobs. Members of the Workers' Organizing Committee founded Voz Workers' Rights Education Project in 2000 and in 2008 we gained our 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. Voz is a worker-led organization that empowers immigrants and day laborers to gain control over their working conditions through grassroots organizing, leadership development and community education. Voz was chosen by then-Portland Mayor Tom Potter to operate the center and has been doing so ever since.

Day laborer community leaders unify and strengthen their families and community through working with Voz, transforming their own realities and progressing immigrant and workers' rights. This remains true, particularly around our policy reform and institutional change work, which includes our End Police/ICE Collaboration campaign.

History of ACT Network

Voz was part of the founding group that started the Safe Communities Project in 2010, charged with ending Police/ICE Collaborations in Multnomah County. This project became the Activists Coming Together for Justice and Dignity Network, or, ACT Network in 2011. Voz has supported the network's efforts of ensuring those directly affected by police/ICE collaborations are at the table with decision makers. We have also seen the network grow over the years to include more community leaders invested in this cause. The ACT Network strategically planned and coordinated efforts this year to include marches and rallies that proved successful. We saw a small victory this year in county policies regarding ICE holds when the Multnomah Board of Commissioners unanimously approved a resolution supporting Multnomah County Sheriff Dan Staton's decision to stop complying with federal immigration holds for low-level offenders in county jails.

Under the new policy being implemented by the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, people suspected of undocumented immigration will only be held for ICE if they have been charged with a felony, a Class A, personal misdemeanor or if ICE can demonstrate through an affidavit that an individual poses a threat to public safety based on previous, non immigration-related, convictions or current charges relating to:

- violence, threats, or assaults
- sexual abuse or exploitation
- Three or more misdemeanor

convictions

- driving under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance
- unlawful possession of firearm or other

deadly weapon

- the distribution or trafficking of a controlled substance

If the person was charged with low-level misdemeanors, including non-person A misdemeanors, or if the ICE detainer is issued based solely on immigration charges or convictions, the Sheriff's Office will no longer hold individuals for ICE after their booking charges have been cleared.

The Multnomah County Sheriff's Office will not comply with I-247 detainer requests for individuals, who only:

- Have been convicted of illegal entry pursuant 8 U.S.C. § 1325;
- Have illegally re-entered the country after previous removal or return (felony);
- Have been found by an immigration officer or an immigration judge to have knowingly committed immigration fraud.

The opening interview with the day laborer was transcribed by Romeo Sosa, executive director of Voz Workers' Rights Education Project.

For more information or for information in Spanish please visit web.multco.us/news/board-supports-sheriffs-policy-immigration-holds.

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problems. The number of unassisted renters with "worst-case housing needs" — that is, the number of renters with incomes below 50 percent of the median income in the local area who either paid more than half of their income for housing or lived in severely substandard housing — has risen by 43 percent since 2007, to 8.5 million households, according to a new HUD analysis of Census data.

With the gap between rental costs and the incomes of poorer households continuing to grow, homelessness remains a persistent problem. About 1.5 million Americans spend some time in emergency or temporary shelters every year. While there has been recent progress in reducing chronic homelessness, the number of homeless families with children has grown sharply since the beginning of the Great

Recession: since 2007, the number of families with children living in shelters and other emergency housing has increased by an estimated 32 percent.

The effects of high housing costs on low-income renters — particularly children — can be severe and enduring. When housing costs are unaffordable, low-income households have insufficient income to cover other basic needs, such as food, clothing, medications, child care and transportation, and they are unable to save or invest in education to help lift themselves out of poverty. Research also shows that housing instability and homelessness interfere with the healthy development of children in ways that have a lasting impact, including hindering children's educational success and thereby reducing their future earnings as adults.

Conclusion

The Bowles-Simpson commission and some other major bipartisan groups that have examined the nation's long-term fiscal challenges have espoused the principle that deficit-reduction efforts should not increase poverty or exacerbate hardship for vulnerable Americans. This year's sequestration violates this principle, forcing deep and indiscriminate cuts in non-defense discretionary programs. Approximately one-quarter of non-defense discretionary funding supports programs targeted on low-income families and individuals, including housing assistance. Cuts in non-defense discretionary programs have already made a large contribution to deficit reduction: under the tight spending caps established by the Budget Control Act, non-defense discretionary funding will fall by roughly \$900 billion from 2012 to 2021 (relative to its 2010 levels adjusted for inflation),

reaching its lowest level on record as a share of GDP (in data that go back to 1962).

Sequestration deepens these cuts. If Congress fails to reverse them, low-income families will experience a significant loss of rental assistance, and more individuals and families will likely experience lengthy periods of housing instability and homelessness, compromising their children's chances to develop into healthy and productive adults. To avert these consequences, Congress should reverse sequestration for 2013 and future years and pursue alternative deficit reduction measures that, among other things, will protect low-income individuals and families.

This column was edited for space. You can read the complete unedited article at www.cbpp.org.