



February 13, 2018

The Honorable Raúl Labrador
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security
U.S. House of Representatives
1523 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security
U.S. House of Representatives
1401 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Labrador and Ranking Member Lofgren:

We are the Co-Chairs of the Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force. The Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force (LEITF) consists of law enforcement professionals from across the United States. Since 2014, the Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force has gathered chiefs, sheriffs, and executives across the country who are committed to protecting all members of their communities -- immigrant and native-born -- and who support immigration reform. Our current membership includes 95 law enforcement professionals and associations, primarily police chiefs and sheriffs, from 30 states plus the District of Columbia.

The LEITF is concerned with promoting safe communities and respect for the rule of law. We believe that when immigrants feel safe in their communities, we are all safer. We wanted to share our principles with you as you examine the issue of “The Effect of Sanctuary City Policies on the Ability to Combat the Opioid Epidemic” at the House Judiciary Committee hearing on February 15, 2018. These principles are endorsed by all members of the LEITF.

1. When immigrants feel safe in their communities, we are all safer.

Our broken immigration system promotes illegality. For otherwise law-abiding immigrants who might be undocumented, the fear of being caught and removed from the country is greater than the fear of criminals operating in their communities. In fact, criminals can use the fear of deportation to coerce these immigrants into silence, making our communities less safe for everybody. As victims or witnesses of crime, undocumented immigrants might be afraid to call authorities when criminal activity is happening in their neighborhoods, and might even fear calling an ambulance when someone is sick or injured. For law enforcement officers charged with public safety, this situation creates breeding grounds for criminal enterprises and undermines safe communities.

By bringing undocumented immigrants into the legal immigration system and encouraging accountability to our immigration laws, they can become constructive partners with local police in public safety

initiatives, while providing undocumented immigrants with an opportunity to earn citizenship in the future will encourage further civic responsibility.

Immigrants should feel safe in their communities and comfortable calling upon law enforcement to report crimes, serving as witnesses, and calling for help in emergencies. This would improve community policing and safety for everyone.

2. State and local law enforcement should target criminals, not contributing members of the community.

As law enforcement officers, we have witnessed the many ways in which our broken immigration system undermines basic law enforcement functions. Law enforcement should spend its limited time and resources focusing on pursuing truly dangerous criminals, not otherwise law-abiding members of the community. Fixing the immigration system would undermine criminal enterprises preying upon undocumented immigrants, including those engaging in human trafficking, blackmail and fraud.

The current immigration system facilitates a lucrative business for cartels and other criminal organizations rather than protecting our communities. The lack of legal avenues for family members to be reunited with their loved ones in the U.S. drives immigrants into the hands of criminal organizations. Migrants face extortion, kidnapping and violence on their journeys, on routes increasingly controlled by sophisticated criminal organizations involved in aiding with unauthorized entry for large fees. Some of these organizations are also involved in drug smuggling and may force immigrants to become “drug mules” in exchange for passage or charge immigrants additional “tolls” to cross their territory to come to the United States. Increasingly, smuggling organizations are forcing immigrants into labor or prostitution to pay back claimed fees, turning smuggling into human trafficking.

For immigrants who want only to work and earn a living, the lack of legal immigration avenues has bred a “black market” for illegal immigration criminal support organizations. By reforming our immigration system and replacing these illegal pathways for immigration with legal ones, these criminal enterprises will no longer have a group of vulnerable people to prey upon.

3. Federal law enforcement should refocus its priorities toward catching serious criminals and security threats.

Federal immigration agencies, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), do not have the capacity or resources to remove all undocumented immigrants. Border agents are focused on major transnational criminal organizations that bring drugs, guns and violence into our communities, yet they must dedicate much of their resources to apprehending and removing immigrants who have no criminal background or affiliation and are merely seeking work or trying to reunite with family.

By deprioritizing those who pose no threat, federal immigration agencies can allow law enforcement to focus limited resources on real threats. Under this approach, federal immigration agencies can further intelligence-driven and risk-based policing.

4. A larger legal workforce encourages respect for the rule of law.

The existing broken immigration system steers employers and workers into illegal work arrangements. The vast majority of undocumented immigrants come to this country for the opportunity to make a living and build a better life. If possible they would choose to come legally, but in most cases, the current immigration system does not provide avenues from them to do so. As a result, they come without authorization in desperate attempts to improve their lives.

As U.S. workers increasingly shun occupations in agriculture, food processing and other similar fields, employers continue to have difficulty filling such jobs. At the same time, many immigrants are separated from family for as long as a generation — up to 15 or 20 years in some cases — despite having family members willing to sponsor them for green cards.

Reforming the legal immigration system is the simplest way to promote compliance by both workers and employers. Federal authorities should permit undocumented immigrants who are already living and working in the United States to apply for a legal, provisional status while they work to earn permanent residence. This will provide future immigrants with legal avenues to enter the country and help local businesses hire legal employees. It will also broaden the legal labor market for the jobs that many undocumented workers often fill, for which there are very few permanent visas and often no guest worker visas available.

5. Immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility.

Immigration enforcement on the state and local levels diverts limited resources from public safety and undermines trust within immigrant communities. State and local law enforcement agencies face tight budgets and often do not have the capacity or resources to duplicate the federal government’s work in enforcing federal immigration laws. Rather than apprehending and removing immigrants who have no criminal background or affiliation and are merely seeking to work or reunite with family, it is more important for state and local law enforcement to focus limited resources and funding on true threats to public safety and security.

Additionally, state and local law enforcement need the trust of their communities to do their primary job, which is apprehending criminals and protecting the public. We can best serve our local communities when we foster strong relationships built on trust. When state and local law enforcement agencies are required to enforce federal immigration laws, undocumented residents may become fearful that they or people they know will be exposed to immigration officials and are less likely to cooperate. We believe that we must work together with federal authorities to protect our communities and that we can best serve our communities by leaving the enforcement of immigration laws to the federal government.

6. State and local law enforcement need adequate resources.

To the extent that state and local law enforcement play a role in immigration enforcement, the federal government must provide adequate funding in line with these responsibilities. In a time of limited resources and tight budgets, state and local law enforcement cannot afford to carry out unfunded and underfunded federal mandates. If the federal government is looking to partner with state and local law enforcement on various immigration initiatives including Secure Communities, immigration holds, or the 287(g) program, it has a responsibility to adequately fund such initiatives.

We remain ready to work with you as you craft solutions for our broken immigration system that may impact local law enforcement officials. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

Tom Manger
Chief of Police
Montgomery County, MD

Art Acevedo
Chief of Police
Houston, TX

Margaret Mims
Sheriff
Fresno County, CA

cc: Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner
Rep. Lamar Smith
Rep. Steve King
Rep. Jim Jordan
Rep. Ken Buck
Rep. Mike Johnson
Rep. Andy Biggs
Rep. Luis Gutierrez
Rep. Pramila Jayapal
Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee
Rep. Jamie Raskin