

Juntos

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Hello, my name is Cristobal Valencia and I am a member of Juntos. I am here today to speak on behalf of Juntos the organization and Juntos as part of the Philadelphia Family Unity Network on the subject of the city of Philadelphia's use of ICE holds. PFUN is currently comprised organizations and advocates who work directly with many different immigrant communities. Our formation has been a result of years of work by these organizations on the issue of ICE and municipal law enforcement. That work has led us to create this coalition and to focus on the use of ICE holds in Philadelphia, an issue we have been requesting to discuss with decision makers since May of 2013 but to no avail.

We as PFUN are asking for four things:

1. We want to end the use of all ICE holds in the Philadelphia criminal system.
2. We want to end the access of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to interrogate individuals held in Philadelphia city custody for the enforcement of civil immigration laws.
3. We want to prohibit all municipal law enforcement personnel from asking about immigration status.
4. And finally, we want to ensure meaningful community engagement and review in the creation and implementation of any policy regarding the relationship between police and immigration authorities.

We all know that ICE's top priority is to enforce federal immigration laws and subsequently deport people. Knowing this we do not believe that local law enforcement has any role in ICE's mission. It is not the Philadelphia Police Department's job to do ICE's work. It is along these same lines that we believe it is not the city's role to use municipal resources to provide ICE agents access to city spaces to conduct Federal investigations. Volunteering our community members for deportation through the use of ICE holds or allowing ICE agents within local law enforcement buildings to enforce immigration law only breeds distrust between the immigrant community and city police and violates our belief in human dignity and the right to a second chance.

The enforcement of ICE holds here in Philadelphia is one of the reasons that community members actually fear their local police. This is not just what I and other members of Juntos have experienced, but a fact that has been documented with research. According to the University of Illinois in Chicago in their report "Insecure Communities: Latino Perceptions of Police Involvement in Immigration Enforcement" more than 4 in 10 Latinos are less likely to report a crime and 45% of Latinos are less likely to volunteer information about crimes because they know that information is being shared with deportation agents.

The policy that the Mayor's office is proposing, while it would do away with some ICE holds, would continue to use ICE holds and volunteer some members of our community for deportation. Continuing to use any ICE holds sends a message to immigrant communities that it is not safe to call the police. We have seen this in how the Mayor's executive order from 2009 was put into practice--although it prohibits police from asking immigration questions in certain situations, the policy is not clear and police continue to ask immigration questions. In these situations, the police are doing the job of the deportation officers and the distrust in the community continues.

Because of this history of mistrust in immigrant communities, we need a clear mandate that separates local police from deportation authorities. We do not need a policy that draws lines in our community and still subjects part of our community to deportation. The only way to send a clear message that the city will not volunteer our community members for deportation is to end the use of all ICE holds.

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Ultimately, not a single ICE Hold should be honored in the city of Philadelphia because their only purpose is to deport immigrants and separate families. We are all human beings with rights regardless of our status, and when ICE Holds are in place you are taking away an immigrant's right to a due process. That is why we are asking the Mayor to hold further action until he himself has met with the Philadelphia Family Unity Network to discuss with the community our proposed Executive Order language. Now, Mayor Nutter, is the time for Philadelphia to stand up for human rights, stand up against deportations and end the enforcement of ICE holds.

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