

July 20, 2015

Dear Members of Congress,

We, the undersigned civil rights, immigrant rights, victims' services, and human rights organizations write to express our strong opposition to any legislation that would seek to undermine state and local law enforcement's efforts to build and restore community trust.

Good policies are made over time, by examining our shared values and opinions, and by working toward equality and justice for all people. They are not made based on a single, tragic incident or by taking the actions of one individual to justify a policy that criminalizes an entire community. Sadly, in response to the tragic death of Kathryn Steinle, some politicians, including Senator David Vitter, are proposing legislation that scapegoats all immigrants based on the acts of one. These reactionary policy proposals are focused on heavy-handed, enforcement-only approaches despite the fact that studies show that deportation-only policies do not reduce crime rates. Rather, those policies only foster an atmosphere of mistrust and fear, and undermine public safety in all of our communities.

Such proposals are not even supported by the federal agency they are purportedly aimed at helping – the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). As DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson himself acknowledged in a July 14, 2015 hearing before the House Judiciary Committee, “I do not believe that mandating through federal legislation conduct of sheriffs and police chiefs is the way to go. I think it will [be] hugely controversial. I think it will have problems with the Constitution.” Secretary Johnson also confirmed he is not alone in this belief, when he testified, “In my judgment, and the judgment of a lot of other border security, immigration enforcement experts, the way to most effectively work with these jurisdictions, again, is a cooperative one, not by hitting them over the head with federal legislation that will engender a lot more litigation.”¹

Policies like those introduced by Senator Vitter would undermine trust between local and state law enforcement and the communities they serve to protect. Over 320 localities in diverse geographic regions such as Kansas, California, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania and many other states have limited their involvement in immigration enforcement because of concerns about liability for failure to uphold Fourth Amendment protections and concerns that such involvement undermines community trust in the police, a critical component to effective policing.

States and localities should be permitted to pursue policies that foster trust and cooperation with their local communities. If victims and witnesses are afraid to come forward and work with the police, the police simply cannot do their jobs.² Moreover, as confirmed by a July 2015 report by the American Immigration Council, increased immigration to the United States has in fact

¹ Testimony of Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson before the United States House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, July 14, 2015.

² A 2013 study found that 44 percent of Latinos surveyed reported being less likely to contact police officers if they have been a victim of crime because they fear that such contact could provide an opportunity for police officers to inquire into their immigration status or that of a person they know. Nik Theodore, “Insecure Communities: Latino Perceptions of Police Involvement in Immigration Enforcement,” University of Illinois at Chicago (May 2013).

coincided with a significant decrease in both violent and property crimes nationwide.³ We know that the majority of the immigrant population comes to this country to reunite with family, work and make meaningful contributions that enrich their communities. What we need is a long-term Congressional solution aimed at addressing our broken immigration system, not reactionary policy proposals that focus on only one facet of the system.

The dialogue surrounding this tragic event only fosters stereotypes and misinformation about the immigrant community. To be clear – the immigration system is broken and needs reform. But moving forward with reactionary and sweeping legislation on one facet of the system doesn't solve the problem. The real solution to our immigration challenges is broad and humane immigration reform which would place undocumented immigrants on a workable and earned path to citizenship, thereby allowing them to contribute even more to their families, communities, and our country.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus
Alliance for Citizenship
American Civil Liberties Union
American Immigration Lawyers Association
America's Voice Education Fund
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence
Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Center for Popular Democracy
Church World Service
Farmworker Justice
Futures Without Violence
Immigrant Defense Project
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Latin American Working Group Education Fund
Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
League of United Latin American Citizens
Mi Familia Vota
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association (NAAPIMHA)
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON)
National Domestic Workers Alliance
National Education Association

³ Walter A. Ewing, Ph.D., *et al.*, "The Criminalization of Immigration in the United States," Immigration Policy Center (July 2015).

National Guestworker Alliance
National Immigration Forum
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center
National Korean American Service and Education Consortium
National Latin@ Network: Casa de Esperanza
National Lawyers Guild
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA)
PICO National Network
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
South Asian American Leading Together (SAALT)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
United We Dream
We Belong Together

Regional, State, and Local Organizations

Alliance San Diego
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Chicago
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – LA
Asian Counseling and Referral Service
California Immigrant Policy Center
California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance
Canal Alliance
Capital Region Organizing Project
Central American Resource Center (CARECEN-LA)
Chinese for Affirmative Action
Chula Vista Democratic Club
CLEAN Carwash Campaign
Community Leadership Association (ALC)
Council on American-Islamic Relations San Diego Chapter
Enlace
Florida Immigration Coalition (FLIC)
Gamaliel of California
Genesis
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Coalition
Justice Overcoming Boundaries
Kitsap Immigrant Assistance Center
Korean Resource Center
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area
MAAC Project
Make the Road New York

Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest
New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice
New York Immigration Coalition
North Bay Organizing Project
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
OneAmerica
Orange County Immigrant Youth United (OCIYU)
San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council
San Diego Dream Team
San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium
San Joaquin Immigrant Youth Collective
Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network (SIREN)
Skagit Immigrant Rights Council
South Asian Network
Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition
Unitarian Universalist Refugee and Immigrant Services and Education (UURISE)
VA Coalition for Immigrant Rights
Washington Community Action Network
Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Workers Defense Project