



Attorney General's ICE directive doesn't tie law enforcement's hands

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October 15, 2019

Scores of community members — clergy, teachers, social workers and other regular folks — have shown up at meetings of the Monmouth County freeholders and the Toms River Township Council every time a resolution to oppose Attorney General Gurbir Grewal’s “immigration trust directive” is on the agenda.

They have spoken with passion, with deep empathy and a with sense of foreboding on the consequences of blocking the directive in our towns and neighborhoods. They have argued that not complying with the directive would compel the undocumented to retreat into the shadows even more so than now. It would make them fearful of approaching the police when they face abuse at the workplace; when their employers cheat them and not pay them their wages; or when they face burglary, robbery, domestic abuse or assault.

Their children — more than half a million of whom are citizens — will wake up every morning not knowing if this would be the day when they would lose their parents to detention and deportation. They described how the work immigrants do at low cost and in often exploitative work conditions is integral to the health and wealth of our towns. How can we continue to take greedily all that the immigrant gives, yet not stand by them in their moment of need simply for the sake of political expediency?

Yet, nothing they said made any difference. Time and again the council members and freeholders have chosen to ignore their plea and plow ahead with what is fundamentally a racist, anti-immigrant, nativist and fear-mongering narrative.

They continuously raise alarm that the attorney general’s directive, which limits local law enforcement from cooperating with federal immigration authorities, would endanger the safety of our communities and expose them to dangerous criminals, even though their alarm is not borne out by facts. According to Monmouth County Sheriff Shaun Golden, of the 7,845 inmates who were processed in the Monmouth County jail in 2018 only 40 were found to be undocumented immigrants. These numbers are consistent with the results of many studies, such as the one done by the Conservative Cato Institute, which shows that immigrants, both documented and undocumented, are less likely to commit crime than native-born Americans.

Besides, the attorney general's directive is clear that in cases of serious crimes, local law enforcement is not constrained by this directive and have the unequivocal obligation to investigate to the fullest extent possible, working with federal immigration agents if needed. So, there wouldn't be any kid-glove treatment of the 40 cited in the sheriff's numbers.

One of the primary objectives of Attorney General Grewal's directive was to curtail ICE's ability to deport the undocumented in New Jersey who have not committed a crime but have nevertheless come to ICE's attention through such things as routine traffic stops.

As a volunteer at Casa Freehold, an immigrant rights support group in Freehold Borough, I was recently made aware of exactly such an incident. In late August a woman was stopped by the police and given a ticket for driving without a license and was asked to appear before a judge. When she appeared before the judge, she was given 10 days in detention at the Monmouth County Detention Center. At the end of her 10 days, she was removed to an ICE detention facility under the custody of homeland security.

She has lived in the U.S. for more than 25 years, and has raised two children who were born here. She drove so she could go to work, take her kids to school, to a doctor — the same reasons why driving becomes paramount for anybody. She did not have a license because New Jersey does not allow the undocumented to have driver's licenses. And the attorney general's directive could not protect her since last spring Monmouth County renewed its commitment to the 287(g) program to continue its long collaboration with federal immigration agencies, in direct non-compliance with the attorney general's directive, with incredibly devastating consequences in people's lives.