



Trump's Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement Office: What You Should Know

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During his first speech to Congress, President Donald Trump mentioned that he was creating a program within the Department of Homeland Security called the Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement (VOICE).

Trump argued that the office was necessary for the safety of the country. "We are providing a voice to those who have been ignored by our media and silenced by special interests," he explained during his speech. Critics of the policy, however, said that Trump is profiling an entire group of people and reinforcing a negative public opinion.

What is VOICE, how did it come about, and what are some of the larger arguments against it? Here are five things you need to know.

1. Trump signed an executive order establishing the office on January 25.

Trump's speech to Congress wasn't the first time VOICE has been brought up. According to CNN, Trump signed an executive order on January 25 titled "Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States" that included a provision about creating the office. The order also called for the office to submit "quarterly reports studying the effects of the victimization by criminal aliens present in the United States."

2. The Department of Homeland Security supported Trump's order.

Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly wrote in a memo that he would enforce the order to protect the safety of the American people. "Criminal aliens routinely victimize Americans and other legal residents," DHS head John Kelly wrote in that memo. "Often, these victims are not provided adequate information about the offender, the offender's immigration status, or any enforcement action taken by ICE [Immigrations and Customs Enforcement] against the offender." Victims, he said, will be kept up to date on the person's immigration status, according to *Vice News*.

The Department of Homeland Security will also fulfill part of the executive order that calls for the gathering and publishing of a weekly list of arrests, crimes and convictions of undocumented immigrants released from custody, among other information, *Vice News* reported.

Additionally, Kelly further supported the order by directing ICE to take any funds and resources meant to help undocumented immigrants and instead use those funds for this office, *Vice News* reported.

3. The order isn't backed by research.

Ever since he announced his presidential campaign back in 2015, Trump has made numerous claims about undocumented immigrants in the U.S. leading to increased crime rates.

However, research has shown the opposite to be true. In 2015, the Cato Institute, a public-policy research organization, found that immigrant communities don't have any effect on violent-crime rates, and some research has indicated that immigrants commit fewer violent crimes than people born in the U.S.

Moreover, CNBC reported that the overall number of violent crimes has been decreasing since 1990.

4. The office was originally suggested by an organization that honors victims killed by undocumented immigrants.

According to *Vice News*, Maria Espinoza, cofounder of the Remembrance Project, which works with families of victims killed by undocumented immigrants, first approached Trump and other Republican candidates during the presidential campaign and asked for a federal office that would offer legal help and financial aid to cover the cost of burial, grief counseling, and child care expenses, among other forms of support.

5. Opponents say it's scapegoating and racial profiling.

Shortly after Trump's speech, critics argued that even if the order says it generally targets all "undocumented immigrants," there are still underlying racial and ethnic connotations. "The fact is, you can find crimes committed by any group, no matter how you define them. Immigrants, native-born, white men, Latino men — you're going to find criminals of any demographic category," Walter Ewing, a senior researcher at the American Immigration Council, told *Business Insider*. "And to choose one and blame them for crime in general is just very disingenuous."

Other opponents of the order have said that the creation of the office and other actions are directly correlated to the rise in hate crimes seen around the country. "The country saw a resurgence of white nationalism that imperils the racial progress we've made, along with the rise of a president whose policies reflect the values of white nationalists," said Mark Potok, a senior fellow at the Southern Poverty Law Center, to *Business Insider*.

Even some conservatives question the need for the new office. "The majority of undocumented immigrants are good, hardworking people," Alfonso Aguilar, president of the Latino Partnership for Conservative Principles and a former Trump supporter, explained to CNN. "A small minority, and you're absolutely right, smaller than those in the general population, engage in criminal activity. So it is blown out of proportion. I don't know — I think the office is just going

to keep statistics and things like that, but I think if they do the research [they'd] realize that the majority of undocumented immigrants are really not involved in criminal activity."