



Undocumented Immigrants Fearful As ICE and Alamance County Strengthen Partnership

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Maria Telles-Sosa lives in constant fear. In her Burlington, N.C. three-bedroom trailer, she's worried that she'll be the only family member left to take care of her six grandkids, who live with her.

The husbands of her two daughters were picked up at a checkpoint by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

"I would stay home with the children while [my daughters] had to go to work. It was really stressful and anxious because I was afraid that my daughters were going to be picked up too. And then what would I do if they were taken as well?"

Her husband was also arrested along with her sons-in-law at the ICE checkpoint which was set up right outside their mobile home park. Since none of the three men had a driving license, they were immediately arrested and taken to the Alamance County Detention Center for a day. Afterward, they were transported to the Stewart Detention Center in Georgia.

"Right now we're just really afraid," Sosa said. "My husband was gone for a week so he lost his job."

Sosa and her husband came to the U.S. from Mexico to be reunited with their daughter who is also in the country undocumented.

While her husband was away, Sosa pinned money to the largest Virgin Mary statue in her home. She hoped if she gave money, a miracle would be given to her.

The miracle came, although temporarily, to the tune of a \$5,000 bond that allowed her husband to be released.

Alamance County

Sosa lives in Alamance County. A county that has recently become the center for ICE activity in North Carolina.

Several sheriffs in counties including Wake, Mecklenburg, Durham and Forsyth have all terminated their 287(g) programs with ICE. The agreement meant that ICE would pick up an undocumented immigrant after sheriffs arrested them for a crime and alerted the agency.

Since the terminations, ICE has increased raids and arrests across the state. More than 200 undocumented people were arrested in one week earlier this month.

While other counties have ended their partnership with ICE, Alamance County continues to strengthen that alliance.

At a recent Alamance County Board of Commissioners meeting, commissioners unanimously passed an updated contract with ICE to detain undocumented immigrants. In the contract, ICE pays the county \$135 per inmate per day. They also agree to fill at least 30 beds per day for the first month of the contract.

According to Alamance County Board of Commissioners Chair Amy Galey, the county needs the money.

“Alamance County has historically low property tax rate and we struggle with funding some things, like our school system and other county needs, so this is a way for our sheriff’s department to be a little more independent,” she said.

Sheriff Terry Johnson

At a recent commissioners meeting, Sheriff Terry Johnson had strong statements about undocumented immigrants.

“The people that we’re trying to hold here are criminal illegal immigrants that [are] actually raping our citizens in many, many ways,” he said.

Advocates for undocumented immigrants, and the NAACP denounced Johnson’s use of the word “raping.” NAACP President Curtis Gatewood was arrested at a recent commissioners meeting for speaking beyond his time limit regarding the ICE contract with Alamance County.

Sheriff Johnson said he’s more concerned that undocumented immigrants pose a safety risk to citizens.

“They crossed the border illegally the first time, that is not my concern,” he said. “But when they cross the border illegally, come in here and deal drugs and kill people, cartel activity, that is my concern.”

Academic researchers, libertarian think tank the Cato Institute, and others have produced reports showing that undocumented immigrants commit less violent crimes compared to native-born citizens.

These reports also show that crime involving immigrants are inflated by low-level offenses and the initial act of illegal entry.

Siembra, NC

Advocates for undocumented families says ICE’s new way of operating is causing widespread panic among the more than 300,000 undocumented immigrants in North Carolina.

Siembra, NC, a grassroots organization aimed toward informing undocumented immigrants of their rights, is helping many find lawyers and get out of jail if arrested.

Organizing coordinator Andrew Garces said the recent climate in Alamance County is instilling fear among the undocumented community.

“Can you imagine? It’s totally random,” he said. “It could be me, it could be your brother, my neighbor. There’s a feeling of terror just leaving your house.”