



Washington, Benton County Should End 287(g) Participation

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A lot of people probably don't know what 287(g) is. This isn't because they're uneducated or they aren't up to date on local politics but because sheriff offices in these respective counties have tried to stay obscure behind a veil of secrecy that perpetuates nonsensical policies like this one.

Here are the details: 287(g) is a section of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act indicating an agreement between U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and our county's police departments that gives police the power to act as ICE agents and detain people for them. In exchange, the police get additional training on ICE's dime, while Benton and Washington counties' deputies are forced to pick up extra work.

Still confusing? Well, there's a reason for that. The Center for American Progress has reported a lack of transparency within the program nationally, and Benton and Washington counties are no different from the other 77 counties that participate.

Instead of Washington and Benton counties planning the annual public forum meant to educate constituencies about 287(g) so that it would be accessible to the public at reasonable hours, they opted for a different approach.

How does 10 a.m. on a Tuesday sound? Instead of a meeting location with plentiful seating, how about a cramped room with so few seats that even those forced into standing are packed like sardines?

Don't get there even two minutes late either, or you can expect to stand outside in the frigid cold, as State Rep. Nicole Clowney (D) and former congressional candidate Josh Mahony (D) had to. If it sounds like I'm speaking from personal experience, that's because I recently attended the 287(g) meeting in Benton County.

Yes, the Washington and Benton County steering meetings were both held in Benton County. Sheriff Tim Helder of Washington County didn't even show up to hear from his constituency. After making those affected by 287(g) drive all the way from Washington to Benton County, he did not even show up to hear from them.

Sheriff Shawn Holloway of Benton County did show up, however, and he listened, which is something everyone can appreciate. As we see the fight over immigration occur on the national stage, the hypocrisy of a sheriff not showing up for his own constituents is too poignant to avoid mentioning.

Overall, though, both parties and counties are at fault. As the cries to abolish ICE get more fervent, it no longer makes sense to equate our police force with ICE, especially because the Black Lives Matter movement is already calling attention to the gross, racially charged incidents within our police forces.

Many counties that used to participate in 287(g) have recently ended cooperation with ICE because of allegations of racial profiling. This is a pattern, and we are falling into a trap because of an unfounded fear of undocumented immigrants striving for a better life.

In addition, the research against 287(g) is clear. Despite comments from Holloway that it has gotten violent crime off the streets, this program “is not targeted primarily at serious offenders,” according to the Migration Policy Institute. The MPI has also found that 287(g) is frequently a tool used by local sheriffs to strengthen immigration measures because of political pressure, arresting non-violent undocumented people at the opportunity cost of stopping violent crime elsewhere. The final nail in the coffin for 287(g) should be this: The Cato Institute has found that 287(g) does not fight crime, but it certainly does increase the number of assaults against police officers in areas where it is implemented.

Perhaps you are among the 39 percent of Americans that insist on building the wall, according to CNBC, or the 25 percent of Americans that support abolishing ICE, according to CBS News. Either way, there are too many negative effects on immigrants for the police force to justify doing this.

Let’s also discuss the effect on our local immigrant communities. At the steering committee, Holloway heard stories from those whose loved ones have been affected, like Good Shepherd Lutheran Church pastor ClintSchnekloth’s retelling of his parishioner’s challenge of awaiting his green card while under ICE detainment.

His detainment affects his freedom and costs taxpayers money, but his wife’s distress from their separation and her being forced to pick up extra shifts at a nursing home while awaiting the stability and comfort that her husband provided is what should make us empathetically understand that this program doesn’t deserve a dime of our tax dollars.

Undocumented immigrants and the police do have one thing in common: Both groups are negatively affected by 287(g). If we care about these groups at all, we should be calling Helder and Holloway to remind them that Washington County is about open arms for the most vulnerable members of our society.