



City should reject federal safety partnership

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Recently U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions attempted to bully the city of Albuquerque into dropping its alleged status as a sanctuary city. Unless a policy change satisfies the Trump administration, local law enforcement would be excluded from participating in the federal government's initiative known as the National Public Safety Partnership.

If the Duke City is selected as a participant in this program, lawmakers must be aware that participation would further erode public trust and make law enforcement more receptive to the needs of the federal government, rather than the needs of the public.

Research from Nobel Prize Winning Economist Elinor Ostrom and her successors has shown that as local law enforcement agencies become financially reliant on the federal government for revenue and resources, they become less responsive to their residents' needs. The War on Drugs and the militarization of local police departments have already created perverse incentives for police departments, and in the process delegitimized them in the eyes of the public. This trend is expected to continue as the federal government attempts to cookie-cut local police departments and corrections agencies to fit the goals of federal immigration policy. The Public Safety Partnership is a terrifying and unfortunate attempt to homogenize police departments across the United States.

The new federal program would provide training and technical assistance to qualifying cities assuming they demonstrate a commitment to reducing violent crime stemming from immigration. According to the website the partnership would "identify and prioritize resources that will help local communities address their violent crime rates." Before qualifying for the program, the Department of Justice wants assurance that the city of Albuquerque has policies in place that satisfy the federal government's requirements regarding immigrant detention. This attempt to further centralize, or perhaps commandeer, local police and corrections agencies poses a serious threat to the balance of powers afforded by our system of governance.

Not only is it a threat to federalism, but the attempt by the federal government to stomp out "crime stemming from immigration" is not supported by the data. A recent policy report from the Cato Institute's Alex Nowrasteh demonstrates that immigrants, both documented and undocumented, are less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans. Legal immigrants are 69 percent less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans; similarly illegal immigrants are 44 percent less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans. Lawmakers should make policy based on facts, not based on misinformation and popular mythology.

While it may seem like Albuquerque is in dire need of more resources to fight crime, it is not entirely clear what type of resources would be granted by the partnership. Would it be worth the federal assistance if the Albuquerque Police Department's progress in improving community relations was simply undone? What if the resources came in the form of more military equipment giveaways to our local departments? What if training includes deputizing local police as immigration officers under section 287 (g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act? Each of these possibilities would result in less cooperation with the local police and therefore less public safety.

Research from George Mason University economists suggests that police performance, and therefore public safety, relies on how money is spent, not how much. Federal assistance in the form of revenue is not guaranteed to reduce crime nor improve community relations.

It's also important to note that, according to the most recent data available, violent crime and property crime statewide were lower during the first five years of this decade than in the 1990s. No doubt crime in Albuquerque is a problem that seems to be getting worse, but the recent hysteria over New Mexico's crime rates has more to do with election season, for both the left and the right, than actually promoting public safety.

One thing is clear, Albuquerque's participation in this program would inflame police-community relations, expand the power of the federal government and siphon local resources toward immigration enforcement. The partnership is simply a bad deal for Burqueños.