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Message to Trump: California isn't in the deportation business

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The Trump administration and California can agree on this point: Public safety must be a top priority. But in California, we believe our communities are safest when we have trust between our law enforcement and the communities they serve.

We need the public, including immigrants, to be our eyes and ears — to report when they witness a crime or are victims themselves. Unfortunately, the Trump administration is trying to puncture that trust by taking us to court.

Just ahead of visiting California for the first time as president Tuesday, President Trump tweeted misleading claims about California's public-safety policies, suggesting that our state laws put people at risk. In fact, our laws are in place to protect our families and strengthen public safety.

Last week, Attorney General Jeff Sessions filed a lawsuit against the state of California, challenging three of our state laws under the pretense that these laws interfere with federal immigration authorities and harm public safety. This action reflects a misunderstanding of the U.S. Constitution, our state laws and the American ethos on a fundamental level.

California laws and policies do not provide “sanctuary” for criminals. We aggressively go after criminals, regardless of their immigration status. And we work regularly in tandem with our federal partners to assist in, for example, combating gangs, human trafficking and the peddling of drugs.

What we do not do, though, is the job of federal immigration agents. We're in the business of public safety, not deportation.

Here's what the Trump administration is missing:

First, our state laws fully comply with federal law and the U.S. Constitution. While the Constitution gives the federal government the primary responsibility to enforce immigration laws, it also provides state and local governments with broad power to regulate their local public-safety work, so long as they do not reach into areas under the control of the federal government.

In fact, the Constitution — in particular, the 10th Amendment — prohibits the federal government from commandeering state and local governments to enforce a federal program.

None of our state's laws regulate immigration or interfere with the ability of federal immigration authorities to do their jobs. Rather, California is acting on its own turf by regulating its *own* law enforcement officers, detention facilities and workplaces to ensure that the confidentiality of the state's residents is safeguarded and their constitutional rights protected.

Second, California adopted its laws to *promote* public safety. Our law enforcement officers often rely on the cooperation of undocumented victims and witnesses to apprehend and prosecute criminals. Last year, we produced a report with four other states and D.C. compiling instances where undocumented immigrants have provided important information that led to the arrest and prosecution of perpetrators of heinous crimes, such as murder and sexual abuse.

Third, in announcing the administration's lawsuit, Sessions erroneously attributed an uptick in crime to a lack of enforcement of immigration laws and overlooked a century of research demonstrating that immigrants are no more likely than U.S. citizens to commit crimes.

In fact, both the Cato Institute and Center for American Progress found last year that more diverse communities with more immigrants have lower crime rates.

The Cato Institute concluded that undocumented people age 18-54 are 44 percent less likely to be incarcerated than U.S.-born individuals, while documented immigrants are 69 percent less likely to be incarcerated than U.S.-born individuals. The Center for American Progress found that counties that limited law enforcement participation in civil immigration enforcement had lower crime rates and stronger economies than comparable counties that did not.

As Los Angeles Police Department Chief Charlie Beck explained: "When you create a shadow population . . . that fears any interaction [with law enforcement], then you create a whole population of victims, because they become prey for human predators who extort them or abuse them because they know they won't contact the police."

People who come to our country in search of a better life for themselves and their children are more likely to follow the laws and enrich their communities. California is the sixth largest economy in the world in part thanks to hard-working immigrants such as my parents.

My father, a construction worker, and my mother, a clerical worker — both immigrants from Mexico — worked tirelessly to make ends meet and raise my three sisters and me. Their story is emblematic of the spirit that immigrants bring to our nation.

We can stand simultaneously with law enforcement and our immigrant communities. We can vigorously enforce our criminal laws against those who have committed serious and violent crimes and be heartbroken to hear stories of families being torn apart by deportations.

California, as fully authorized under the Constitution and federal law, has made its own determination for how best to strike that balance. I will continue to zealously fight to defend our state laws and protect the public safety of all Californians.