

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

April 6, 2021

Dear Secretary Mayorkas,

People of faith believe in the dignity of all people, including our undocumented neighbors. The Trump administration wreaked havoc on immigrant communities and it is imperative that the Biden administration end the harmful policies that continue to harm our families and jeopardize community bonds. As twenty-six faith-based organizations, we write to ask that you end programs and practices that entangle local law enforcement with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), including the 287(g) program, Secure Communities and ICE detainers.

Many of our own congregations and communities have become sanctuary for people who have been targeted by the mass deportation agenda of the prior administration, and we are heartened that leadership is now recognizing the need to address racism and xenophobia and bring meaningful changes to our criminal justice and immigration systems.

As the new Secretary of Homeland Security, we hope that you recognize the harm caused when ICE taps local law enforcement agencies to engage in federal immigration enforcement.

Families should not have to live in fear that local officials meant to help them in emergencies and times of need could actually send them or a loved one to ICE to be deported. Too many families have been split apart, and too many children have seen their parents detained and deported after local officials turned them over to ICE.<sup>1</sup>

ICE collaboration programs like 287(g), Secure Communities, and ICE detainers have made our family members, congregants, and neighbors afraid of law enforcement. Bringing an end to these programs would send a renewing and welcoming message that your office will work towards trust and partnership rather than deportation and criminalization.

Studies have found and our own experience confirms that immigrant communities are less likely to cooperate with law enforcement when they believe that law enforcement is working

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<sup>1</sup> Audrey Decker, "Bill to rebuild trust between immigrants and law enforcement," AP, March 5, 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/bill-to-rebuild-trust-between-immigrants-and-law-enforcement/2021/03/05/9315a0b4-7e05-11eb-8c5e-32e47b42b51b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/bill-to-rebuild-trust-between-immigrants-and-law-enforcement/2021/03/05/9315a0b4-7e05-11eb-8c5e-32e47b42b51b_story.html)

with ICE.<sup>23</sup> Researchers have found that the decision by local law enforcement to enter agreements with ICE engenders “the erosion of trust between immigrants and police,” and this climate of distrust can lead to “increased victimization of immigrants” by those seeking to do harm.<sup>4</sup> This inability to seek help has particularly harmed survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking.<sup>5</sup>

We are also concerned that local entanglement with ICE has negative consequences for our public health. For instance, a recent study found that 287(g) agreements may dissuade pregnant immigrants from seeking prenatal care.”<sup>6</sup> We are especially troubled that immigrants, who were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and already face greater healthcare disparities, may now be less likely to seek vaccinations due to fear that local officials will turn them over to ICE.<sup>78</sup> “Immigrants’ health is indirectly undermined by fear of seeking medical care, or relief from domestic abuse, sexual assault, stress and trauma,” according to the American Public Health Association.<sup>9</sup> Despite these grave concerns, the number of 287(g)

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<sup>2</sup> Tom K. Wong, “Sanctuary cities don’t ‘breed crime.’ They encourage people to report crime,” Washington Post, April 24, 2018.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/04/24/sanctuary-cities-dont-breed-crime-they-encourage-people-to-report-crime/>

<sup>3</sup> Kelsi Loos, “Study of arrest rates posits that 287(g) immigration enforcement keeps Hispanics from going to the police,” Aug 14, 2017.

[https://www.fredericknewspost.com/news/crime\\_and\\_justice/courts/study-of-arrest-rates-posit-that-287-g-immigration-enforcement-keeps-hispanics-from-going-to/article\\_a2357ae3-943f-53e0-b718-797a1fd6b659.html](https://www.fredericknewspost.com/news/crime_and_justice/courts/study-of-arrest-rates-posit-that-287-g-immigration-enforcement-keeps-hispanics-from-going-to/article_a2357ae3-943f-53e0-b718-797a1fd6b659.html)

<sup>4</sup> Mai i Nguyen, Hannah Gill, “The 287(g) Program: The Costs and Consequences of Local Immigration Enforcement in North Carolina Communities,” The Institute for the Study of the Americas, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, February, 2010.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280234453\\_The\\_287g\\_Program\\_The\\_Costs\\_and\\_Consequences\\_of\\_Local\\_Immigration\\_Enforcement\\_in\\_North\\_Carolina\\_Communities](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280234453_The_287g_Program_The_Costs_and_Consequences_of_Local_Immigration_Enforcement_in_North_Carolina_Communities)

<sup>5</sup> Kathryn Finley, “Access to Justice in a Climate of Fear: New Hurdles and Barriers for Survivors of Human Trafficking and Sexual Violence,” Center for Migration Studies, Jan. 29, 2019

<https://cmsny.org/publications/finley-climate-of-fear/>

<sup>6</sup> Tanvi Misra, “The Link Between Immigration Enforcement and Babies’ Health,” Bloomberg, March 10, 2021,

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-03-10/how-immigration-enforcement-lowered-birth-weights>

<sup>7</sup> “New Study Shows Disproportionate Impact of COVID on Immigrants, Migrants,” National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants, Feb. 16, 2021,

<https://nrcrim.umn.edu/new-study-shows-disproportionate-impact-covid-immigrants-migrants>

<sup>8</sup> Danae King, “Undocumented immigrants’ fear of arrest, deportation may keep them from COVID-19 vaccine,” Columbus Dispatch, Feb. 4, 2021,

<https://www.dispatch.com/story/news/2021/02/04/undocumented-immigrants-covid-vaccine-fear-arrest-deportation/4358676001/>

<sup>9</sup> American Public Health Association, “Opposing the DHS-ICE Secure Communities Program,” Oct. 30, 2012,

<https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2014/07/18/11/24/opposing-the-dhs-ice-secure-communities-program>

contracts nationwide has dramatically increased in recent years, including 126 new ones that were signed by the prior administration.<sup>10</sup>

No matter what we look like, how we pray, or where we were born, people of faith are committed to advancing the values of human dignity and loving our neighbors. Our teachings and traditions are clear that these values extend to how we treat immigrants in our nation. We encourage the Biden administration to turn the page on the cruelty of the prior administration and immediately end these harmful policies and programs.

In faith,

Faith in Public Life

National Justice for Our Neighbors

Church World Service

New York Justice for Our Neighbors, Inc.

Just Neighbors

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team

Austin Region Justice for Our Neighbors

Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

Union for Reform Judaism

Justice for Our Neighbors Michigan

First Community Church

Franciscan Action Network

Bravo & Bravo

Immigrant Allies of Marshalltown

Leadership Conference of Women Religious

American Friends Service Committee

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC)

Hope Border Institute

Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the U.S. & Canada

National Council of Jewish Women, Inc.

Friends Committee on National Legislation

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Ignatian Solidarity Network

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<sup>10</sup> Nicole Narea, "New Democratic sheriffs in Georgia and South Carolina have vowed to cut ties with ICE," Vox, Nov. 17, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/2020/11/17/21558400/sheriff-ice-north-carolina-georgia-287g>