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.¹  

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  

¹ 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
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. This inability to seek help has particularly harmed survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking.

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. 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. “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. Despite these grave concerns, the number of 287(g) agreements has increased.

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

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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10 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