

Contact:

Rachel Cohen, Immigrant Defense Project, 917-370-8464, rachel@immdefense.org
Mariana Ochoa, United We Dream, (786) 807-7425, mariana@unitedwedream.org

March 29, 2022

170 Organizations Send Letter to DHS Secretary Defending Local Policies that Protect Immigrant Communities

Washington, D.C. – Scores of immigrant rights, community-based and legal advocacy organizations today [sent a letter](#) to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas calling on him to reverse course on his attempts to undermine local policies that protect immigrant communities and urging him to follow through on promises to end existing programs that entangle localities with DHS. The letter comes after Secretary Mayorkas, at the U.S. Conference of Mayors in January, asked mayors to consider colluding with his agency in seeking to arrest and deport our community members.

As organizations working to protect immigrant communities, we stand firmly and proudly by our local and state policies that limit collusion with DHS agencies including ICE, HSI and CBP. Designating our community members as “public safety threats” to justify collusion exacerbates dynamics of inequality, marginalization and racism in the criminal legal system.

A growing number of local leaders instead recognize that protective pro-immigrant policies are necessary for a vibrant, healthy and trusting community. For this reason, together we call on the Secretary to reverse course on recent attempts to undermine these policies, and to follow through with promises to end existing programs that entangle localities with DHS including 287(g) programs and Secure Communities.

You can read the full letter [here](#), which has been signed on to by over 170 organizations from across the country.

“Throughout the past decade, we have fought to maximize protections for New Yorkers from ICE and to end entanglement between the discriminatory criminal legal and immigration systems. Fighting the police-to-deportation pipeline became all the more critical since the implementation of the Secure Communities program in 2012, which effectively transformed NYPD precincts into a notification system for ICE to target our community members. The detainer laws we fought for and won in New York City must be strengthened—not scaled back. ICE continues to fabricate public safety threats to justify ICE detention and deportation, and we will not accept it,” **said Mizue Aizeki, Senior Advisor, Immigrant Defense Project in New York City.**

“Immigrants across the country have organized against 287 (g) agreements, which disproportionately profile, target, and criminalize Black and brown people. This led to

meaningful victories in places like Harris County in Texas, and Gwinnett and Cobb counties in Georgia, among others. By asking Mayors and local elected officials from around the country to cooperate and become extensions of ICE, Secretary Mayorkas and the Biden administration are undermining immigrant communities' hard fought victories to keep ourselves safe. ICE has a track record of human rights abuses. ICE has not changed and it never will. That is why we the people (including local elected leaders) must demand the end to the 287(g) program, secure communities and cut the funds and reach of federal immigration enforcement agencies like ICE," **said Juan Manuel Guzman, State Advocacy Director of United We Dream.**

"Our community tirelessly organized to win a Sanctuary City policy in Philadelphia to end collaboration between local authorities and ICE. Secretary Mayorkas' call to mayors to reconsider working with ICE to arrest and deport immigrants is a slap in the face to all of us who truly stand for immigrant communities. This administration needs to stop terrorizing our people and start fulfilling its promises to build a fair and humane immigration system," **said Daisy Romero Chavarria, Community Organizer for JUNTOS in Philadelphia**

"Here in Illinois, our state and local elected officials have spoken loudly and clearly that our law enforcement agencies should not cooperate with immigration enforcement. We have worked long and hard to make sure that immigrants can call the police without fear that they will themselves come under suspicion. Any calls to further entangle local police with ICE will undermine the trust we worked to build, to the detriment of our entire community," **said Fred Tsao, senior policy counsel at the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights**

"Colluding with DHS agencies that have a culture of impunity and abuse, and allocating local resources to deport and separate families erodes community trust in local law enforcement agencies, and ultimately puts the public safety of everyone at risk. State laws such as the CA TRUST Act, CA TRUTH Act and the CA Values Act and other local policies that prohibit local and state agencies from engaging in immigration enforcement and allocating resources that aid in the deportation of our community members have been crucial in ensuring that everyone in our region feels safe. This is why we call upon Secretary Mayorkas to immediately stop his attempts to re-entangle local and state law enforcement with DHS agencies and to cease undermining public safety in our region," **said Erin Tsurumoto Grassi, Policy Director for Alliance San Diego**

"As municipal leaders, we know how valuable our immigrant communities are to the vitality and future of our cities — and we see first-hand the cost of the federal government's inhumane immigration policies in separating communities and ripping families apart. The continued use of the racist Title 42 policy and detention of families under the current administration make it clear that the need for strong sanctuary cities remains. Let's be clear: the onus is on Secretary Mayorkas to make substantive changes within DHS to fully respect the rights of cities to protect our immigrant communities," **said Philadelphia Councilmember Helen Gym, Co-Chair of Local Progress.**

The Immigrant Defense Project (IDP) is a New York-based nonprofit that works to secure fairness and justice for immigrants in the racially-biased U.S. criminal and immigration systems.

IDP fights to end the current era of unprecedented mass criminalization, detention and deportation through a multi-pronged strategy including advocacy, litigation, legal support, community partnerships, and strategic communications. Visit www.immigrantdefenseproject.org and follow [@ImmDefense](https://twitter.com/ImmDefense).

United We Dream is the largest immigrant youth-led organization in the nation, a powerful network made up of over 800,000 members, over 100 local groups, and a reach of over 5 million per month. UWD's vision is to build a multi-racial, multi-ethnic movement of young people who organize and advocate at the local and national levels for the dignity and justice of immigrants and communities of color in the United States. You can find more about UWD online at www.unitedwedream.org.

###