



Law Enforcement Leaders Express Growing Concern with Secure Communities Program

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The Secure Communities program has been promoted by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as a way to catch and deport undocumented immigrants convicted of serious crimes.

However, the program, also known as S-Comm, has led to the deportation of tens of thousands of undocumented immigrants whose only “crime” was to be in the country without papers. In fact, more than [60%](#) of all immigrants deported under the program were involved in low-level, minor offenses like traffic violations, or were never convicted of any crime at all.

Law enforcement officials across the country are increasingly sharing their concerns that the Secure Communities program is hurting their ability to fight crime and keep their communities safe. It has damaged the relationship between police and the communities they serve, making immigrants less likely to report crimes.

In recent days, state officials have moved to withdraw from or suspend their participation in Secure Communities. [Governor Quinn in Illinois](#) has opted out of the program. The [TRUST Act](#), currently under consideration in the California State Legislature, would give localities the choice of whether to participate or not. [Governor Cuomo](#) in New York has suspended his state’s participation in the program, while [Governor Patrick](#) in Massachusetts has refused to sign on altogether.

State and local law enforcement officers should be in the driver’s seat when it comes to policies that impact their daily work. If an immigration policy hurts the ability of law enforcement to solve crime and protect the public, lawmakers in Washington should be listening. The following is a compilation of quotes from law enforcement leaders around the country who agree that Secure Communities is an ineffective immigration policy that damages community relationships, nets too many non-criminal immigrants, and hurts their ability to fight crime:

CALIFORNIA

San Francisco Sheriff [Michael Hennessey](#):

My main criticism of Secure Communities is that it casts too wide a net and scoops up the fingerprints of everyone not born in the United States whether or not they pose a criminal risk. My department has consistently reported felons to ICE for more than a decade, and ICE typically picks up close to 1,000 people from the San Francisco County Jail each year. But I don't think people should be deported for a traffic ticket or for operating a tamale cart in the Mission...

Los Angeles Police Chief [Charlie Beck](#):

[There is a] crisis of confidence [in Secure Communities]. The program can be a] detriment when it causes the vast majority of the immigrant population, who are here as non-violent, non- crime-committing individuals, to lose trust in police.

Sheriff [Ed Prieto](#) of Yolo County:

There is no doubt that violent criminals should be arrested, go through the process here and be deported. However, for low level offenses and civil immigration violations, local law enforcement should not be doing ICE's job. It creates mistrust amongst immigrants and is not beneficial to the community.

Director of the Law Enforcement Engagement Initiative and former Sacramento Police Chief [Arturo Venegas](#):

Many people don't realize that immigration violations are a civil offense. The Secure Communities program is blurring the lines by deporting large percentages of non-criminal immigrants through a program purporting to target serious criminals.

[Arturo Venegas](#) on Cuomo's decision to suspend Secure Communities in New York:

ICE misrepresented the so-called 'Secure' Communities program to law enforcement. The fact is, it's eroding trust with local law enforcement and making everyone less safe. Immigrants want to live in safe communities, but this flawed program is wasting local resources and preventing witnesses and victims to crimes from coming forward. Gov. Cuomo's decision is a smart move that will help improve public safety in New York. I look forward to seeing continued progress toward restoring police-community trust in California.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

DC Police Chief [Cathy Lanier](#):

In the case of domestic violence, or if it is a minor misdemeanor case, there is a concern people will not come forward and report it [if immigration status checks accompanied all contact with police.]

ILLINOIS

Kane County Sheriff [Patrick Perez](#):

The Secure Communities program has hindered law enforcement's ability to deal with the Hispanic community. There has to be trust between the people in our community and the police. A lot of crimes have gone unsolved because people in the community are not coming forward for fear of being deported. The fact that people have been deported for minor violations is a very severe disappointment. Hopefully the failure of this program sparks a meaningful effort to reach a compromise on immigration reform that we need to move forward.

MASSACHUSETTS

Fitchburg Police Chief [Robert DeMoura](#), former deputy police chief in Lowell, said that if Patrick signed on to the program, it could lead to "panic" in the immigrant community. He said any deportation program should focus on serious criminals only:

We want to get convicted felons that are in the country illegally deported, not a kid who came over here to go to college, overstayed his visa and was stopped for a misdemeanor.

Chelsea Chief of Police [Brian Kyes](#):

[Secure Communities has created] mistrust of local police, discouraged people from reporting crime, and made everyone more vulnerable to crime by breaking down hard earned relationships.

Hudson Police Chief [Richard Braga](#):

I would strongly support a program that would enhance information sharing, and would help law enforcement hold and deport illegal aliens who have committed crimes. However, I would not embrace a plan that would serve to target law-abiding residents or those who commit minor infractions simply because they happen to be here illegally.

Marlborough Police Chief [Mark Leonard](#) said that, based on a quick review of Secure Communities, he would support the program if it does indeed focus on "true criminal aliens." The measure may actually benefit immigrants, he said, by dealing with criminals who prey on their community from within:

We've had incidents where we've had people who will commit crimes against people in their community because they don't think people will report it to the police.

Massachusetts Public Safety Secretary [Mary Beth Heffernan](#):

The governor and I are dubious of the commonwealth taking on the federal role of immigration enforcement. We are even more skeptical of the potential impact that Secure Communities could have on the residents of the commonwealth.

NEW YORK

President of the New York State Police Benevolent Association [Thomas H. Mungeer](#):

We support Governor Cuomo's action today in suspending Secure Communities until the numerous questions, including a federal Inspector General's investigation, can be resolved. Police rely upon a partnership with the communities that they serve to ensure the public safety of us all. The questions that have surrounded the implementation of Secure Communities drives a wedge between law enforcement and the people they are sworn to protect. We are confident that the procedures we currently use and the strong relationships we currently have with federal, state and local authorities will ensure that we can keep our communities safe while also maintaining our relationship of trust.

Counsel to the New York State Association of Chiefs of Police [John Poklemba](#):

Governor Cuomo has made the right decision to take New York State out of the controversial Secure Communities program. This program unfortunately has had a negative impact on our crime-fighting efforts. Law enforcement must have tools and resources that are both effective and fair.

Sheriff of Rensselaer County and President of the New York State Sheriffs Association [Jack Mahar](#):

Every day, law enforcement officers put their lives on the line to rid our neighborhoods of crime, and we do it with the cooperation of the law-abiding public. This program was intended to make communities safer and stronger, but many people question whether this program has really accomplished its objectives. Governor Cuomo is right to remove our state from this program until all concerns are addressed.

Clinton County Sheriff [David Favro](#):

Governor Cuomo's decision to freeze the Secure Communities program until the questions that have been raised about its implementation can be settled, is a wise one. While we are sworn to keep our communities safe, that cannot come at the price of their trust. Our strong current partnerships with federal law enforcement and long-standing operations in this state will ensure that we continue to communicate effectively to identify undocumented immigrants in our county jails and take appropriate actions.

Chautauqua County Sheriff [Joseph Gerace](#):

We support Governor Cuomo's action today in suspending Secure Communities until the numerous questions, including a federal Inspector General's investigation, can be resolved. Sheriff departments rely upon a partnership with the communities that they serve to ensure public safety for us all. The questions that have surrounded the implementation of Secure Communities jeopardizes that relationship. We are confident that the procedures we currently use and the strong relationship we currently have with federal, state and local authorities will ensure that we can keep our communities safe while also maintaining our relationship of trust.

Steven Krokoff, Chief of the Albany Police Department:

In light of the confusion surrounding this program and the pending Inspector General's review, the Governor's decision to freeze this program until the federal review is complete is appropriate. The procedures we currently use will ensure the safety of neighborhoods across the state while at the same time encouraging individuals in all communities to come forward to report crimes.

UTAH

Salt Lake City Police Chief, Chris Burbank on Cuomo's decision to suspend Secure Communities in New York:

The Secure Communities program combined with misguided state legislation has promoted a shift in local law enforcement's mission across the country and driven a wedge between the police and public. The resulting priority adjustment places emphasis upon civil immigration action over community policing and all criminal enforcement. The conceit of the program is its intention to target serious criminal offenders. Unfortunately, community members and traffic violators are often more significantly impacted than violent offenders. We in law enforcement must safeguard community trust. Without the support and participation of the neighborhoods in which we serve, we cannot provide adequate public safety and maintain the well-being of our nation. As Governor Cuomo appropriately asserts, the Secure Communities program has not had its intended effect and we have experienced more negative than positive.