



WASHINGTON STATE SHERIFF'S ASSOCIATION

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DATE: June 22, 2009

TO: Senator Patty Murray
Senator Maria Cantwell,

FROM: Washington State Sheriffs' Association

RE: The Time Is Now to Fix the Broken Immigration System and Its Safe-Guards

For years, the federal government has failed to deal with the broken immigration system and left our communities to deal with the effects: illegal drug trade; smugglers who take advantage of immigrant workers and families; criminals who prey on immigrants because they believe they won't be reported; the expense on local courts and local jails; millions of individuals trying to better their lot in life but who easily work with false papers or driving without a license; over-burdened schools; and an over-burdened health care system. The time is now to fix the broken immigration system and its safe-guards.

The lack of a coherent national immigration policy has created chaos in our communities and made the job of law enforcement much harder. Very bad people have been allowed to easily find their way into our communities and victimize us. There has been confusion and disparities in how law enforcement agencies have chosen to handle immigration issues nationwide.

The lack of a coherent national immigration policy has also had an enormous negative impact on the trust that many of our sheriff's offices and police departments have worked hard to build with immigrant communities over the years. We know from experience that law enforcement is most effective in achieving its job of keeping the community safe when there is strong trust built. However, the lack of a federal solution to the civil immigration system has stymied or eroded the trust we have built and our ability to effectively police all of our community.

Instead of forcing state and local police to pick up where the federal government has failed, Congress and the President must reform our immigration laws. We urge Congress and the President to enact a comprehensive immigration law that secures the borders and addresses the reality of illegal workers in a comprehensive manner so that this nation can move forward as one.

We need a national immigration system that is just and humane and yet allows us to keep clear the important distinction between federal officials who enforce civil immigration law versus local law enforcement who enforce criminal law.

Our immigration system must process applications in a timely fashion so that immediate families can be together, whatever the decision may be on overall strategy. Likewise, it must remove criminal aliens from the United States and punish human smugglers and unscrupulous employers who might try to profit from a broken system.

Ultimately, we believe strongly that enacting comprehensive federal immigration reform will allow state and local police to focus on job number one: protecting all members of our communities from crime. We urge Congress and President Obama to pass federal immigration reform as soon as possible as we serve our country and our communities on the front line every day.

The time is now to fix the broken immigration system and its safe-guards.

The Washington State Sheriffs' Association

Yakima County Sheriff Ken Irwin, President

CC: President Barack Obama

Senators Schumer & Cornyn, Senate Judiciary Committee

Representatives Lofgren & King, House Judiciary Committee