



July 29, 2010

Secretary Janet Napolitano
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Napolitano:

The impending implementation of SB 1070 at the end of July in Arizona is state sanctioning of hatred that was once confined to a fearful, if vocal, minority. Are we going to let each state draft its own immigration policy, or are we as a country going to take the courageous leap toward reforming our unjust and broken federal immigration laws in the rightful place, the Congress of the United States? The Department of Justice has taken a strong step by suing the State of Arizona for legalizing racial profiling and for interfering with the federal government's authority to set and enforce immigration policy. Now we must take the urgent next step: institute humane and fundamental reforms to the entire system.

We could cite the sad stories of divided families, children separated from their parents, unannounced transfers and deportations, and miserable jail conditions. This all is taking place here in Georgia--in Cobb and Gwinnett, in Whitfield and Hall, in detention centers in Lumpkin and the City of Atlanta--wherever 287(g) agreements are in effect and beyond. We hear these stories every day and see the fear in the eyes of those who dwell on the edges of society.

Hoping for courage in the White House and Congress to reform immigration laws this year, we urge certain critical changes in the way the Department of Homeland Security administers immigration policy until new laws are passed.

First, suspend the 287(g) and Secure Communities programs. The flaws in these programs are well-known and documented. Local police often oppose the 287(g) agreements because they distract them from their real work and alienate the people they need to protect. Instead of making our communities safer, these programs are being used as tools to detain and deport hard-working and law-abiding fathers and mothers. There are potential Sheriff Arpaios in every corner of the country who claim to enforce the law while practicing blatant racial profiling and posse justice.

Second, put a halt to the expansion of the immigration detention system, taking the money out of the coffers of such for-profit corporations as Corrections Corporation of America and back into the wallets of taxpayers by utilizing humane, effective, and cost-saving alternatives to detention. Most immigrants in detention do not pose a risk to public safety and should be released. Community-based alternatives to imprisonment should be employed for those who cannot be

released on their own recognizance, bond, or parole, while they await final decisions on their immigration status.

We are encouraged to learn from ICE that conditions in immigrant detention facilities may be changing to less punitive environments. However, we have seen little evidence on the ground of the promised changes first announced last year. Instead, we have witnessed the opening of yet another corporate-run immigration detention facility in Hall County, Georgia.

The real solution is to end the programs that feed these costly and unnecessary penal institutions. The profits gained by privately owned and operated prisons and the cost to the taxpayer for detaining hundreds of thousands of people are the deplorable result of this ill-conceived system.

As veterans of the civil rights movement and representatives of social-justice and faith-based organizations in Georgia, we urge you to take the bold steps necessary to end this unjust system that creates divided families and improbable prisoners.

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