



**CWS Statement to House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform,  
pertaining to its hearing on Thursday, April 28, 2016**

As a 70-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox communions and 33 refugee resettlement offices across the country, Church World Service (CWS) urges all Members of Congress to support the long-standing efforts of law enforcement officials to foster trusting relationships with the communities they protect and serve. As we pray for peace and an end to senseless acts of violence that are too prevalent in this country, CWS encourages the U.S. Congress to refrain from politicizing tragedies or conflating the actions of one person with an entire community of our immigrant brothers and sisters.

Communities are safer when they pursue policies that strengthen trust and cooperation between local law enforcement and all residents, including immigrants. The federal government should not hurt intentional, community-based policing efforts that are vital in communities across the country. Many cities already recognize the deep correlation between local police opting out of enforcing ICE detainer requests and an increase in public safety, all because of the improved trust in its police force. It is precisely this trust that enables community members to report dangerous situations without the fear of being deported and separated from their families.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, local enforcement of immigration law comes at the expense of public safety priorities. Without the trust and cooperation of all community members, local police face challenges in investigating crimes, apprehending those truly guilty of committing crimes, and deterring potential criminal activity.<sup>2</sup> Forcing local police to serve as immigration officers only exacerbates these challenges, as suspicion and fear of interacting with police undermines community policing efforts, makes community members reluctant to report a crime they witness or are victim to, and thus reduces public safety. CWS supports the 320+ jurisdictions across the United States that limit collaboration with ICE, and we strongly oppose legislation that would punish or attempt to stop states, cities, localities, and police departments from regulating how they interact with ICE.

Deportation-only policies – with or without cooperation from local police – do not increase public safety or reduce crime rates. Despite ICE written policies to prioritize “the worst of the worst” criminals in their enforcement efforts, individuals who are not enforcement priorities are routinely detained and deported.<sup>3</sup> These individuals often present no risk to public safety, and are long-standing community members and parents with young children. In March 2015, ICE engaged in a week-long raid that stole over two thousand immigrants from their homes. More than two-thirds of the individuals picked up were convicted of merely nonviolent offenses.<sup>4</sup> U.S. immigration and deportation policies are not only ineffective at reducing crime, but are also prohibitively costly to taxpayers. In 2013, the United States spent more than \$18 billion on immigration enforcement, more than all other federal law enforcement agencies combined.<sup>5</sup>

The immigrant population comes to this country to reunite with family, work, and make meaningful contributions that enrich their communities. Several studies over the last century have affirmed that all immigrants, regardless of nationality or immigration status, are less likely than American citizens to commit violent crimes.<sup>6</sup> A recent report found a correlation between the increase in the undocumented immigrant population in the United States, and the sharp decline in violent and property crime rates.<sup>7</sup> Immigration is correlated with significantly higher employment growth and a decline in the unemployment rate.<sup>8</sup> Immigrants have built this country and continue to contribute, by picking our crops, putting food on our tables, building our roads and homes, tending to the needs of our children and elderly parents, and serving as doctors, teachers and upstanding community members – all while facing threats of deportation. CWS urges all Members of Congress to support immigration policies that treat our neighbors with the dignity and respect all people deserve, and to affirm local law enforcement's efforts to build trust with their communities.

<sup>1</sup> Nik Theodore, *Insecure Communities: Latino Perceptions of Police Involvement in Immigration Enforcement*, University of Illinois at Chicago (May 2013), [https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/INSECURE\\_COMMUNITIES\\_REPORT\\_FINAL.PDF](https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/INSECURE_COMMUNITIES_REPORT_FINAL.PDF).

<sup>2</sup> Anita Khashu, *The Role of Local Police: Striking a Balance Between Immigration Enforcement and Civil Liberties*, Police Foundation (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Alex Stepick, Steve Held, Cynthia S. Hernandez, Cheryl Little, and Susana Barciela, *False Promises: The Failure of Secure Communities in Miami-Dade County*, Research Institute on Social & Economic Policy, Center for Labor Research & Studies, Florida International University and Americans for Immigrant Justice (2013).

<sup>4</sup> Mennonite Central Committee, “Worst of the Worst?” March 2015 Report, [http://mcc.org/sites/mcc.org/files/media/common/documents/worstoftheworstreport-march242015\\_0.pdf](http://mcc.org/sites/mcc.org/files/media/common/documents/worstoftheworstreport-march242015_0.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> The Migration Policy Institute, *Immigration Enforcement in the United States: The Rise of a Formidable Machinery*, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/enforcementpillars.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Jason L. Riley, *The Mythical Connection Between Immigrants and Crime*, The Wall Street Journal, July 14, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-mythical-connection-between-immigrants-and-crime-1436916798>.

<sup>7</sup> Walter A. Ewing, Daniel E. Martinez, Rubén G. Rumbaut, *The Criminalization of Immigration in the United States*, American Immigration Council (July 2015), <http://immigrationpolicy.org/special-reports/criminalization-immigration-united-states>.

<sup>8</sup> Jack Strauss & Hailong Qian, *Immigrants or Jobs: Which Comes First to a Metro?*, Jan. 23, 2014, [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2339192](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2339192).