

September 1, 2013

**CALIFORNIA FAITH LEADERS SIGN-ON LETTER TO
CA STATE SHERIFF'S ASSOCIATION**

California State Sheriffs' Association
1231 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

cc: Gov. Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown, Jr.

Dear Esteemed Members of the California State Sheriffs' Association:

As religious leaders from denominations and communities throughout California we are reaching out to you, to ask for your cooperation on an important piece of legislation for our state this year that would help mitigate needless suffering and separation of families and honor due process. We are writing as leaders of many different faith communities to ask you to withdraw your opposition to the TRUST Act and support it as it currently stands as passed by the Senate Public Safety Committee, July 2013.

We are guided by two fundamental values espoused by our faith traditions: the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and the opportunity of each person to participate fully and equally in the communities of which they are a member. Secure Communities violates these values by forcing immigrants into the shadows, separating families, depriving children of their parents' love, removing young men and women from the only country they have known, and tearing the fabric of whole communities.

In its present form the Secure Communities program violates fundamental moral principles of our religious faiths and undermines public safety. The TRUST Act will mitigate the damage this program is inflicting on individuals, families, and communities, and restore its original public safety purpose by establishing clear and uniform standards for cooperation between local law enforcement and Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

When Immigration and Customs Enforcement first introduced Secure Communities, it presented it as a public safety program that targeted persons "convicted of a serious criminal offense." ICE repeatedly identified the program's goal as "improving community safety" by working to "identify, detain, and remove aliens convicted of a serious criminal offense." The program promised to promote public safety by focusing on those who posed a grave threat to that safety. But ICE soon abandoned public safety as its goal and turned Secure Communities into a dragnet sweeping up people without consideration of whether they were convicted of any crime, or whether they posed any threat to public safety.

Over 93,000 Californians have been torn from their families and deported under this program, more than any other state. Of these, nearly 70% either had minor convictions or no conviction at all. Even while vetoing an earlier version of the TRUST Act, Governor Brown declared that "Federal agents shouldn't try to coerce local law enforcement officers into detaining people who've been picked up for minor offenses and pose no reasonable threat to their community."

There is no justification for subjecting aspiring citizens to extended detention and deportation when they would otherwise be released and reunited with their families. **Inflicting this hardship on them does not make us safer but weakens and destabilizes the very communities we live in.**

We believe, as faith communities, and with your cooperation, we are obliged to prevent needless suffering whenever we can. The Trust Act could do that. We are concerned that our wholesale cooperation with the Secure Communities program undermines public safety by turning local law

enforcement into immigration agents. This erodes the hard earned support, cooperation and trust between populations being served and Sheriffs' departments and immigrant groups. This undermines community policing efforts.

Former Los Angeles Police Chief William Bratton, recently hired by the City of Oakland to fix its police department, criticized Secure Communities for just this reason: "My officers can't prevent or solve crimes if victims or witnesses are unwilling to talk to them because of the fear of being deported. . . . Criminals are the biggest benefactors when immigrants fear the police. We can't solve crimes that aren't reported because the victims are afraid to come forward to the police."

The program further compromises local law enforcement by diverting limited resources away from fighting crime. It makes our communities **less, not more, secure.**

The false promise and blind injustice of the Secure Communities program is an affront to religious conscience and rational governance, and contrary to our American values of family and community. Urged by our belief in the sanctity of families, the integrity and health of communities, and fair access to due process, we fully support the TRUST Act as an effective way to mitigate the defects of this misguided program. We hope you will join us in that support.

Respectfully submitted, the undersigned Clergy and Congregational Leaders of California:

** Congregations listed for identification purposes only.*

NAME

CONGREGATION *

CITY