



A NETWORK OF HUMAN DIGNITY GROUPS

ROP Board of Directors

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Sheriff Dennis Dotson
225 West Olive Street, Room 203
Newport, OR 97365

Dear Sheriff Dotson,

With the lack of action by the federal government, immigration has become an increasingly contentious issue at the state and local level. Piecemeal attempts at reform at the local level have led to further polarized communities and virtually no workable solutions – as recently brought to light in an April 20th Time Magazine article which features how Columbia County, Oregon has suffered by its front-line status in this heated issue.

Towards that end, the Rural Organizing Project (ROP) would like to share a way that Oregon's County Sheriffs, critical agents of community calm and reason, might use your power during this tough moment to promote unity within your county around the shared goal of public safety.

After seeking feedback from a variety of stakeholders, Marion County's Sheriff Isham turned down a proposal from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement that would have reimbursed the county up to \$700 a day to use the county jail as a holding place for undocumented immigrants suspected of committing crimes.

In rejecting the offer, Sheriff Isham expressed concerns "about how the partnership with ICE would affect the relationships my office has worked so hard to develop with minority groups in Marion County" as well as the actual cost-effectiveness of the proposal. (For more information on Sheriff Isham's decision, see the enclosed article, published in the Statesman Journal on April 23, 2009.)

Local law enforcement officials in other parts of the state have also warned that the collaboration of local, county, and state police with federal immigration officials to enforce immigration laws compromises public safety and deters immigrants from reporting crimes for which they may be potential witnesses, or even from seeking help in cases of domestic violence or emergency health care needs.

We applaud Sheriff Isham's decision and encourage your office to adopt a similar policy. If your county jail currently participates in CAP (Criminal Alien Program) or SCAAP (State Criminal Alien Assistance Program), we urge you to conduct a thorough and critical review of these programs and their actual cost-effectiveness, efficacy and benefit to your county. Sheriff Isham is willing to discuss this matter with other county Sheriffs, should anyone have questions on how he came to the decision he did.

Rural Organizing Project is a statewide organization that exists to advance democracy in rural Oregon. Over 65 locally-based, volunteer-run ROP member groups work to create rural communities accountable to a basic standard of human dignity: the belief in the equal worth of all people. ROP members value the role that county Sheriff offices play in protecting and keeping our communities healthy and safe. We invite the opportunity to provide you resources and support to pursue policies like those adopted by the Marion County Sheriff's office. We can be contacted at office@rop.org.

Sincerely,
Rennie Ferris and Kathy Paterno,
On behalf of the ROP Board of Directors