



Church World Service Statement in Opposition to Proposals that would Dismantle Trust Between Local Police and Communities

In the aftermath of the recent tragedy in San Francisco, Church World Service (CWS) mourns with the family and community of Kathryn Steinle as they experience a tremendous loss. We are praying for peace and an end to senseless acts of violence that are too prevalent in this country. CWS urges all Members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to refrain from politicizing this tragedy or conflating the actions of one person with an entire community of our immigrant brothers and sisters.

During this time of grief and confusion as investigators learn more about this situation, it is important that we do not over-correct and end up hurting intentional, community-based policing efforts that are vital in communities across the country. Many cities recognize how requests by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to hold individuals beyond their court-appointed sentences violate due process and have been found unconstitutional by Federal Courts.¹ Choosing not to honor ICE detainer requests without probable cause or a signed warrant from a judge actually improves public safety by increasing community trust in its police force. When all individuals can report dangerous situations without the fear of being deported and separated from their families, safety is increased for all community members. When local police collaborate with ICE, more crimes go unreported² because victims and witnesses are afraid of being deported if they contact the police. Many local law enforcement agencies and community leaders have spoken out about the harm that this collaboration inflicts on their communities.

CWS opposes proposals that would infringe on the rights of states, cities, localities and police departments from regulating how they interact with ICE. H.R.3002, The Mobilizing Against Sanctuary Cities Act; H.R.2964, The Clear Law Enforcement for Criminal Alien Removal (CLEAR) Act; H.Amdt 352 offered by Rep. Steven King (IA-4) to H.R. 2578, The FY16 Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Act; S.80 introduced by Senator Vitter (R-LA); The Sanctuary Cities Amendment offered by Sen. Cotton (R-AR) to S.1177, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act; and similar proposals are knee-jerk reactions that would do more harm than good. CWS supports the 320 jurisdictions across the United States with policies that limit collaboration with ICE, and strongly opposes punishments for these cities or localities.

CWS is also opposed to mandatory minimum sentences for individuals who re-enter the United States. Such proposals would punish millions of individuals, including parents, grandparents, and young children who are unjustly deported from the United States and then make the journey again to be reunited with their families and communities. It is not in the best interest of these individuals or our communities to further criminalize illegal re-entry. Due to the brokenness of the U.S. immigration system and the Obama Administration's deportation of a record-breaking two million individuals, many of our long-standing community members have been deported. For them, and especially for individuals who have fled indescribable violence, their only option is to return to their homes and families in the United States. It is also important to note that many individuals have been charged with misdemeanors and immigration-related offenses that have been unjustly categorized as "aggravated felonies" because they are not U.S. citizens, making discussions around immigrants and felonies very misleading.³ Further criminalizing individuals who simply wish to live with their families, or who are fleeing threats of homicide, gang-conscription, and gender-based violence in their home countries will do nothing to improve the broken U.S. immigration system.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, CWS mourns in solidarity with the people of San Francisco, and joins them in seeking peace and real solutions to respond to this act of violence. CWS also encourages all Senators and Representatives to resist placing blame and punishment on an entire community of undocumented people following the tragic actions of one person. Instead, we must work together to reform current policies that relate to immigration, gun accessibility, mental health and drug rehabilitation, and the criminal justice system. CWS stands ready to work with members of both chambers to this end.

¹ Maria Miranga-Olivares, Plaintiff, v. Clackamas County, Defendant. United States District Court, D. Oregon, Portland Division. 11 April 2014. <https://scholar.google.com/scholar_case?case=7183853698243436215&hl=en&as_sdt=20006>.

² Anita Kashu, "The Role of Local Police: Striking a Balance Between Immigration Enforcement and Civil Liberties." The Police Foundation. April 2009. <www.policefoundation.org/sites/g/files/g798246/t/Khashu_%282009%29_-_The_Role_of_Local_Police.pdf>.

³ "Aggravated Felonies: An Overview." Immigration Policy Center. March 2012. <www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/aggravated-felony-fact-sheet-march-2012.pdf>.