



A Project to Reimagine the Sheriff

STOPPING MASS DEPORTATIONS THROUGH SHERIFFS



A Toolkit
for
Organizers

MOST SHERIFFS COLLABORATE CLOSELY WITH AND ACT AS A LOCAL EXTENSION OF IMMIGRATION AUTHORITIES.



At the end of the first Trump Administration, 47 percent of deportations went through jails, most controlled by sheriffs. This collaboration includes:

- **Sharing information on people in their jails and holding and transferring people in response to voluntary requests from immigration authorities**
- **Signing agreements empowering their deputies to act as immigration agents**
- **Renting out beds in their jails to immigration authorities**

These practices separate families, make undocumented immigrants more vulnerable to violence and exploitation, and make communities less safe.

Through organizing and policy change, organizers have used the democratic process to convince hundreds of sheriffs to limit cooperation with federal immigration authorities. The Trump Administration has signaled that it aims to subvert that democratic will, and put sheriffs central to the mass deportation plans deputizing sheriff's offices to work on immigration enforcement, expanding the number of jails holding immigrants on behalf of the federal government, and using funding to reward compliant sheriffs and punish those who refuse to collaborate. How this will play out will depend on the sheriff and their community. For organizers and activists looking to protect themselves and their neighbors, holding sheriffs accountable provides a key opportunity to stop deportations at the local level.

This document lays out a set of demands that communities can make to keep sheriffs out of the mass deportation machine, and collects examples of strategies that people can learn from.

DEMANDS TO MAKE OF SHERIFFS

People should ask sheriffs to immediately take action to end cooperation with federal immigration authorities.

Sheriffs should take the following actions:

- ✿ Refuse to allow the space in local jails to be used for the deportation pipeline. End all bed rental programs, known as Intergovernmental Service Agreements (IGSAs), which allow ICE to use space in jails.
- ✿ Refuse to accept or respond to civil detainer requests, unless prevented by state law—detainers are voluntary requests from ICE to: 1) notify ICE when an individual will be released, and 2) continue detaining that person after the criminal system has declared that they should be released, to facilitate transfer to immigration detention.
- ✿ End other agreements with ICE, including the 287(g) agreements that the Trump Administration plans to use to expand its mass deportation force.
- ✿ Prohibit any voluntary information and record sharing with federal immigration authorities, including personal information about people in custody and release dates, and refuse ICE access to internal databases.
- ✿ Prohibit deputies and jail staff from asking individuals about their citizenship or immigration status, and remove citizenship status and place-of-birth questions from intake and booking forms.
- ✿ Refuse ICE access to the jail without a judicial warrant, and refuse to allow ICE to interrogate people in local custody by telephone.

DEMANDS TO MAKE OF SHERIFFS

- ❖ Refuse to provide any logistical support to ICE raids, such as traffic control or securing the perimeter of a target area.
- ❖ Advise noncitizens of their rights and provide a copy of all relevant documents.
- ❖ Encourage state sheriffs' associations to oppose federal immigration enforcement actions, such as ICE raids and arrests, and to oppose anti-immigrant state legislation.
- ❖ Implement policies to reduce arrests so that fewer people are brought to jails.

Note that many sheriffs are restricted from some of these options—see the Immigrant Legal Resource Center's state map to learn more about your state and their local map to see how your county does or does not currently work with ICE.

Read More:

The Role of Sheriffs in the Arrests-to-Deportation Machine
(Immigrant Legal Resource Center)

Questions for Sheriff Candidates (Immigrant Legal Resource Center)

EXAMPLES OF STRATEGIES THAT HAVE WORKED

For generations, people have fought to protect their communities from immigration enforcement and other harms of sheriff's offices. In this moment, we can take inspiration from their example. Below is a non-exhaustive list of strategies that have a proven track record of impact that people who are looking to limit the role of their sheriffs in mass deportation might look to.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZING TO INFLUENCE SHERIFF INVOLVEMENT IN MASS DEPORTATIONS

In some places, sheriffs have willingly agreed to take steps to limit collaboration with federal immigration authorities. In others, organizers have had to pressure them to do so. In New Orleans (LA), organizers with the Congreso de Jornaleros engaged in a birddogging campaign—meeting Sheriff Marlin Gusman at his public appearances, mobilizing allies and eventually winning Gusman's agreement to limit his office's collaboration with ICE. In some places where sheriffs have agreed to limit collaboration with immigration authorities, community support has helped them to stick to this stance in the face of state and/or federal pressure. After sheriffs ended 287(g) agreements in Mecklenburg County (NC) and other counties in NC, federal immigration authorities did raids in the community, but with the community's support the sheriffs remained strong on these policies.



EDUCATING VOTERS AND RESIDENTS ABOUT ANTI-IMMIGRANT SHERIFFS

People have educated voters about the importance of immigration policy in the counties with some of the most prominent anti-immigrant sheriffs— from Joe Arpaio in Maricopa County (AZ) to Thomas Hodgson in Bristol County (MA). In the 47 states where sheriffs elected, immigration policy has played a critical role in many residents' understanding of the sheriff. This has included a host of communities who have ensured sheriffs end 287(g) agreements and/or limit collaboration with immigration authorities, including in counties like Cobb (GA), Gwinnett (GA), Hamilton (OH) and Charleston (SC).



LOBBYING STATE LEGISLATORS TO LIMIT SHERIFF INVOLVEMENT IN IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

State legislation can both encourage and limit the role of sheriffs in immigration enforcement. In Colorado, organizers advocated for legislation that bans local law enforcement from jailing immigrants on behalf of ICE. Conversely, organizers in North Carolina stalled the passage of a bill requiring sheriffs to collaborate with federal immigration authorities for years before it ultimately became law.



DIRECT ACTION TO OBSTRUCT IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

Organizers have used direct action to delay, obstruct or raise the cost of immigration enforcement. As the Obama Administration ramped up immigration enforcement, activists chained themselves together outside an Illinois detention center to block a deportation bus. After the passage of the Muslim Ban in 2017, protesters across the country flooded airports. A year later, at the height of family separations,

protesters again blocked buses transporting people slated for deportation. Organizers in Bergen County, NJ, used a similar tactic to try to prevent the transfer of people detained by the sheriff's office to ICE custody.



ICE ALERT & COMMUNITY DEFENSE SYSTEMS

Monitoring the activity of immigration authorities and alerting people without papers and their loved ones of activity in their area can help people to protect themselves. ICE alert systems have been set up in dozens of communities across the country. Some alert systems deploy responders who monitor or film the activity of immigration authorities and provide support to people targeted and their families.

Immigrant rights organizations across the country have also been conducting know your rights trainings for decades. These trainings may not change sheriff behavior or policy, but they can give people without papers tools to limit their interactions with sheriffs and their vulnerability to deportation once in contact with a sheriff's office.



BUILDING ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES FOR SAFETY

Alternative models of safety can help to avoid the interactions with sheriff's deputies and sheriff-run jails that are often the first step in the deportation pipeline. Communities like Albuquerque (NM) and Denver (CO) have introduced non-police crisis response teams that take the place of sheriff's deputies in behavioral health and other emergencies. Other communities like Austin (TX) have increased the use of citations in lieu of arrest to keep people accused of minor infractions out of jail.



FORCING DISCRIMINATORY SHERIFFS TO RESIGN THROUGH COMMUNITY PRESSURE

Community organizers have occasionally been able to force sheriffs to resign. After a sheriff deputy murdered Sonya Massey in her kitchen, organizing led by the family of Ms. Massey and Black Lives Matter led to the resignation of the Sangamon (IL) County Sheriff and the appointment of a new sheriff who committed to reforms. Similarly, the sheriff in rural Columbus County (NC) who threatened to fire Black deputies stepped down after community pressure led to the prosecutor bringing a removal proceeding.



USING BALLOT MEASURES AND COUNTY COMMISSIONER TO DRIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

In some communities, voters have the power to shape the sheriff's office through ballot measures. For example, organizers have increased oversight over the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department through initiatives like Measure R and Measure A, which gave the county's Civilian Oversight Board power to issue subpoenas and to remove the sheriff, respectively. The San Mateo (CA) Board of Supervisors voted to restrict resources for the sheriff for federal immigration enforcement, after organizers had already forced the sheriff to stop transfers.

RESOURCES

Sheriffs and Their Role in Immigration Enforcement

- [Resource Library](#) (Safety Bound: A Project to Reimagine the Sheriff)
- [The Badge: Spotlight on Sheriffs](#) (The Appeal)
- [The Role of Sheriffs and the Arrest-to-Deportation Pipeline](#) (ILRC)
- [Mapping Far Right and Anti-Immigrant Movement Alignment with County Sheriffs](#) (Political Research Associates)

Tools for Assessing Your Community's Immigration Enforcement Landscape

- [State Map on Immigration Enforcement 2024](#) (ILRC)
- [National Map of 287\(g\) Agreements](#) (ILRC)

Organizing Tools

- [Ending 287\(g\): A Toolkit for Local Organizers](#) (ILRC)
- [ICE Raids Toolkit: Defend Against ICE Raids and Community Arrests](#)
(Immigrant Defense Project & Center for Constitutional Rights)
- [Rapid Response Toolkit - To help advocates prepare their communities for ICE raids and detentions](#) (Catholic Legal Immigration Network)
- [Know Your Rights Toolkit](#) (ILRC)
- [Defund the Police - Invest in Community Care - A Guide to Alternative Mental Health Crisis Responses](#) (Interrupting Criminalization)
- [Civilian Crisis Response - A Toolkit for Equitable Alternatives to Police](#) (Vera)
- [Local Policy Interventions for Protecting Immigrants](#) (ILRC)
- [Defund Sheriffs - A toolkit for organizers](#) (Sheriff Accountability Action, Working Families Organization, Faith in Action & Community Resource Hub)
- [Data Criminalization - a deep guide to data collection and how it is used to criminalize and target communities](#) (Community Justice Exchange)
- [Expose and Disrupt: Using Public Record Act requests to challenge immigration enforcement in your community](#) (ILRC)

SAFETY BOUND

A Project to Reimagine the Sheriff