

Thank you to the Honorable Members of City Council for the opportunity to speak upon this issue of the collaboration of ICE/Philadelphia Police and the proposed policy to continue using ICE detainers for individuals accused of violent felonies.

My name is Caroline Campbell and I represent Congreso de Latinos Unidos. Congreso has been providing high-quality services to the Latino community in Eastern North Philadelphia for 36 years. The agency's mission is to strengthen Latino communities through social, economic, education, and health services, leadership development, and advocacy. Congreso serves over 14,000 individuals annually through 51 programs.

Based on our experience at Congreso of supporting survivors who come for services within our Latina Domestic Violence Program, we know all too well that ICE holds affect entire communities, including victims who frequently face additional barriers due to the city's use of ICE holds. Looking at the bigger picture, language and cultural barriers already make it difficult for some immigrant victims to understand their rights, access services, and work with law enforcement. On top of these ongoing issues, we particularly know that immigrant domestic violence victims are less likely to report crimes or seek police assistance because they fear they themselves or others that they care about will be reported to federal deportation authorities, held, detained or deported.

The threat of deportation weighs heavily on the minds of the community members that we serve. We have seen domestic violence victims be subjected to arrest and imprisonment due to misunderstandings and language barriers at the scene of the arrest. Reports that domestic violence victims have been rounded up are common. We have also seen abusers threaten victims by telling them that they will be deported if they seek assistance. The relationship between the police and deportation authorities contributes to this misperception, and all of these factors make our communities more dangerous because people are not seeking the help that they need.

In addition to these barriers, we also know that victims of violence are mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and partners who have complicated and evolving relationships. They may need assistance or protection from law enforcement to deal with an abusive relationship, but that does not always mean that they want that person to be deported and put into permanent exile from their home and their community. Our clients need supportive services that help them heal and transform their lives, and they need to have control over their own futures. They may want to never see that person again, or they may want to continue their relationship after an incident, or they may need the child support that that person was providing. Many of our clients want to give the person who abused them a chance to rehabilitate themselves, but by using ICE holds, the city is forcing victims to choose between seeking protection and having their family member permanently deported from this country.

The city's proposed policy is particularly concerning to those of us who provide services to victims of domestic violence because it excludes people who are charged with violent crimes.

Our agency has engaged in a very successful telephone outreach project with Women Against Abuse in unison with the Philadelphia Police, that has given us the ability to reach out to high lethality domestic violence victims identified by police incident reports of domestic violence. We have seen through this program that when residents are too scared to contact the police because they fear that their family member will be deported, it becomes harder for law enforcement to do their jobs and keep the community safe. This happens when immigrants believe that local police are simply an arm of the federal immigration enforcement mechanism; they do not report crimes—even as victims or witnesses. That jeopardizes public safety for everyone.

As a multi social service agency who houses one of four domestic violence programs in the city, Congreso believes this kind of collaboration diminishes public safety. For many, the threat of deportation alone can be paralyzing. We are joining the call to ask the city to stop the use of all ICE detainers and invest our precious city resources in programs that will bring real safety and security to our communities.