

STATEMENT OF
Erika Almiron, Executive Director
Juntos
HEARING ON: POLICE AND ICE COLLABORATION
PHILADELPHIA CITY COUNCIL

March 12, 2014

My name is Erika Almiron and I am here before you today as the Executive Director of Juntos, a proud Latina in this city and as the daughter of immigrants. Juntos was started over 12 years ago as a support network for new Latino immigrants in the city and over the last 12 years our community has worked to address the many concerns they have encountered in the city of Philadelphia, the most tragic and destructive of them all being that of deportations. Deportations in our city have led to hundreds of families being separated which in turn has contributed to the decimation of our communities through poverty, children being raised without one or both parents, increased violence, and further isolation of our people from accessing a dignified life.

Over the years Juntos has worked with many allies in this room and beyond to address and change an unequal system that has for decades created a permanent underclass in this city for poor people and people of color. If we do not work to create changes that challenge and shatter this unequal system than we are, through our silence, feeding it and helping it grow. Given that, if we do not do the work to begin to dismantle the relationship between local police and ICE by ending ALL ICE Holds, like so many of the people who spoke before me have asked, we are also feeding the growing deportation machine; a machine that has shattered the lives of almost 2 million families across the country in as little as five years.

Today you heard from many community members and leaders about their experience with the school-to-prison / deportation pipeline, the dropout crisis, mass incarceration, mass deportation, racial profiling and poverty. Many communities have shared these experiences but we also share something better: we share a hope for a better future for our families, one that includes second chances, redemption, love and trust. We have an opportunity here to sit on the side of hope, of love and of justice by creating a policy that does not create divisions among our families, one that can begin to rebuild trust between local police and the community and one that will ultimately create a better Philadelphia for all us.

As you have seen, there are many examples of cities across this country that have taken the courageous step to publicly announce that they do not honor ANY ICE Holds. To have a clear, simple and concise policy that creates no confusion on the side of the police department or in our community. To have a policy that is rooted in the values of this City. This will offer no room for uncertainty on how the policy is implemented, the principles by which it came forth, and further safeguard the city from potential lawsuits because every, single ICE hold risks violating the constitution; the very same constitution that was signed here on the principles we hold dear that make us the City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection.

We are glad to see that the administration & council members have been listening to our demands for a more transparent process and a more inclusive policy and we see this hearing as a great first step. We also believe that we must continue down this road of transparency & inclusivity by continuing this conversation. We, the members of the Philadelphia Family Unity Network, would like to meet with Mayor Nutter alongside with our community leaders to continue these conversations so we may be able to walk away from all of this with a policy that unifies us rather than divides us.