

"Son of Sensenbrenner" Bill (H.R. 2278) Would Make Our Communities Un-SAFE

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The Strengthen and Fortify Enforcement Act (H.R. 2278), which was approved by the House Judiciary Committee on June 18, 2013, is an enforcement-only measure that would make unprecedented changes to our legal system. The bill would subject anyone who appears to be an "immigrant" to unjustified detention and all undocumented immigrants to criminal prosecution, and would delegate unchecked immigration enforcement authorities to states, leaving the federal government to foot the bill.

Here are five reasons to oppose H.R. 2278:

Does not fix our broken immigration system. The bill perpetuates and worsens the same enforcement-only policies that we have been tried over the past two decades. Those policies have not worked. What we need is to create a realistic road to citizenship for the millions of undocumented immigrants who are members of our families and communities.

Law enforcement leaders want to fight crime, not check papers. The bill requires that immigration violations be input into the NCIC, a database used daily by law enforcement to identify serious criminals. Many law enforcement leaders, departments, and associations think this is a bad idea.¹

When the police start enforcing immigration law, immigrant communities stop calling the police. The bill puts local police in the driver's seat in enforcing immigration laws. When this happens, immigrants and racial minorities become less likely to report crime or to serve as witnesses. This makes us all less safe. Twenty-eight percent of U.S.-born Latinos and 70 percent of undocumented immigrants reported they are less likely to contact police officers if they have been the victim of a crime because they fear that police officers will use this interaction as an opportunity to inquire into their immigration status or that of people they know.²

Criminalizing the 11 million undocumented is bad policy and bad politics. The bill instantly subjects every one of the 11 million undocumented to criminal prosecution. Not only is this a poor use of scarce resources, it also runs counter to public opinion. Recent polls show that 83 percent of Americans support a path to citizenship for the undocumented. The bill creates a path to the jailhouse for these same people.

The bill undermines real immigration reform. This is a historic moment. The Senate has passed a comprehensive immigration bill with strong bipartisan support. True bipartisan efforts are underway in the House to achieve common-sense reform that will meet our nation's needs in the 21st Century. The SAFE Act is not the right bill for this moment.

¹ "Any Congressional action that would require state and local law enforcement agencies to engage in immigration enforcement is strongly opposed by the Major Cities Chiefs. . . . That is why we oppose the SAFE Act" "Police Chiefs from Nation's Major Cities Object to Legislative Proposals Requiring Local Police to Enforce Federal Immigration Law," Major Cities Chiefs Association statement, June 2013, www.nilc.org/document.html?id=934.

² Nik Theodore, *Insecure Communities: Latino Perceptions of Police Involvement in Immigration Enforcement* (Dept. of Urban Planning and Policy, Univ. of Illinois at Chicago, May 2013), www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97c6d565-bb43-406d-a6d5-eca3bbf35af0%7D/INSECURE_COMMUNITIES_REPORT_FINAL_V2.PDF.

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