

Close to Home: The best response to President Trump's anti-immigrant doctrine: Pass SB 54

BY MARA VENTURA

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT | September 8, 2017

Sometime today, Senate Bill 54, the California Values Act, is expected to make its way to the Assembly for a vote before, hopefully, landing on Gov. Jerry Brown's desk for his signature. The stated purpose of SB 54, introduced and sponsored by Senate President Pro Tempore Kevin De León is to "protect the safety and well-being of all Californians by ensuring that state and local resources are not used to fuel mass deportations, separate families and ultimately hurt California's economy." In other words, SB 54 would build a wall between California law enforcement agencies and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement creating a "sanctuary state."

One of the more pernicious elements of the Trump administration's immigration enforcement policies has been the targeting of undocumented individuals in public and civic spaces, such as schools, hospitals and courts. SB 54 would establish these places as safe zones. The negative impacts of immigration enforcement are well known: children kept out of school, families not seeking proper health care, putting all of us at risk, and unreported crime.

A study by the Department of Urban Planning and Policy at the University of Illinois found that "70 percent of undocumented immigrants reported that they are less likely to contact law enforcement authorities if they were the victims of a crime." This legislation would create clear and strong boundaries between our local law enforcement agencies and federal immigration enforcement and would further protect victims, largely women, who fear coming forward about crime due to fear of deportation or detention.

SB 54 would prohibit state and local law enforcement agencies from engaging in immigration enforcement, except to allow Immigration and Custom Enforcement interviews and transfers to ICE detention centers if a judicial warrant has been issued. The bill would also require the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to report to the federal government 60 days before violent felons are to be released. Finally, this bill would allow local law enforcement to continue participating in multi-agency task forces, "such as those investigating human trafficking, cyber security and drug trafficking, so long as immigration enforcement is not the primary purpose."

Most important, it would cut down on the number of contributing members of society who senselessly being held in privately operated detention facilities — at great taxpayer expense.

According to a Lobbying Disclosure Act report of the U.S. Senate, two companies, the Corrections Corporation of America and the GEO Group, hold 72 percent of the country's

privately contracted immigration detention beds, from which they net a little over \$194 million and \$143 million in profits, respectively. The for-profit prison system is one of the most powerful lobbying forces in D.C., and it typically advocates for stronger detention and deportation policies. A Penn State study released this year found that the Corrections Corporation of America and the GEO Group spent \$45 million on campaign donations and lobbying from 2002 to 2012.

Under the federal Secure Communities program, California taxpayers spent an estimated \$65 million annually to detain people for ICE, according to a 2012 report prepared by Justice Strategies. Not only is it unacceptable that Californians are spending millions on a system that profits from federal immigration enforcement, it's also not economically and socially viable.

ICE immigration sweeps in neighborhoods and workplaces will lead to hundreds of children suddenly being parentless, labor shortages in key industries, an increase in residents dealing with mental illness, rents and bills being left unpaid and family members and friends left scrambling to deal with belongings left behind. Actual ICE raids have little impact on curbing unlawful entry, and they undermine the state's economy and social fabric.

If we want to see a more prosperous and safe California, we can start by challenging a system of immigration enforcement that drains resources from education and business and generates distrust toward law enforcement. SB 54 represents an important step toward ensuring that our immigrant communities have some reprieve from the intensified xenophobia of the Trump administration and will move us in the right direction to become a stronger and more inclusive California.

Mara Ventura is lead organizer for North Bay Jobs with Justice and a resident of Santa Rosa.