

Testimony of
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Hearing on
“Sanctuary Jurisdictions: The Impact on Public Safety and Victims”
Before the
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C.
October 22, 2019

Introduction

Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Feinstein, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Judiciary Committee to testify about these important issues.

I am Andy Harvey. I served as the Chief of Police in Palestine, Texas for the past two years, stepping down last week to pursue new opportunities to champion community and relational policing. Prior to my years of service in Palestine, I served 21 years and retired from the Dallas Police Department. In Dallas, I commanded variously including Patrol, Investigations, Community Engagement, and the Media Relations Unit.

I am also proud to have served more than 20 years in our military, having served in the United States Air Force Reserves, and Texas Air and Army National Guard. I rose to the rank of First Sergeant and retired in 2008. My proudest achievement was to have served overseas in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

I hold a bachelor’s degree from Midwestern State University and a master’s degree from the University of North Texas, where I also have served as an adjunct professor. I authored a book, *Excellence in Policing*, to increase mutual understanding and respect between the police and its citizens in an effort to keep both safer.

Prioritizing Community Safety

In my years of experience working as a law enforcement leader in diverse Texas communities, I understand that creating a safe environment in the community requires that all residents, regardless of their immigration status, feel safe. Local law enforcement agencies rely on working with federal partners to ensure public safety. In Palestine and Dallas, we regularly worked with federal law enforcement to respond to threats in our communities. But my experience has demonstrated to me that immigration enforcement is, first and foremost, a federal responsibility.

When members of the community do not trust law enforcement, crimes go unreported and it is a detriment to the community as a whole. Nothing concerns police chiefs more than something happening in our cities and towns and not knowing about it until it is too late. Accordingly, as a police chief, I have made it a priority to work towards strengthening ties between the community and its police force.

Local law enforcement and local public safety is limited when we cannot work with our federal agencies. But law enforcement also faces real challenges when members of the community conflate the roles of federal and local law enforcement. Given the increased focus on immigration enforcement in recent years – both at the federal level and at the state level in Texas – there is a cost in compelling localities to carry out duties that traditionally have been the responsibility of the federal government. Efforts to compel state and local law enforcement agencies to become front-line immigration enforcers risks community trust, and again, undermines public safety.

This does not mean that local law enforcement should ignore federal immigration law. Rather, community safety requires effective cooperation – between federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, but also between immigrant communities and those public safety officers who serve them. Such cooperation is helpful in combating threats to public safety, including those related to drugs, gangs, and human trafficking.

We are eager to work with federal authorities to get dangerous criminals off the streets. During my time as a Commander with the Dallas Police Department, I recognized the value of our gang unit officers partnering with federal immigration authorities to get violent people off of our streets. However, I believe that ramping up immigration enforcement against those with minor offenses, or who are simply out of status, drives a wedge between local law enforcement and the communities we police, and I believe striking a balance is essential to ensure public safety to our residents.

Given the existing political climate, and increasingly negative rhetoric surrounding immigrant communities, these communities are on edge. High-profile enforcement activities against the broader immigrant population creates fear. For instance, when

there were reports of immigration raids in the neighboring community of Paris, Texas, or even further away in Mississippi, fear in my community of Palestine, Texas was palpable. Fearful community members are less likely to report crimes or cooperate with police, making everybody less safe.

Relational Policing

In Palestine, I focused on relational policing, which is sometimes called community policing, as a way to reinforce the police department's bond with the community. Relational policing is about building relationships and creating trust within a community. My department has made it a priority to get to know all of our residents – at a deeper level.

When you build relationships, you build trust, creating space for crime victims and witnesses to work with local law enforcement. Immigrants should feel safe in their communities and comfortable contacting law enforcement to report crimes, calling for help in emergencies, and serving as witnesses.

I knew that it was essential for the Palestine Police Department to reach out to our Hispanic community, which historically had not been engaged with local law enforcement. Under my leadership, the Palestine Police Department implemented an initiative called Unidos en Palestine or United in Palestine, an extensive program of community outreach and events to bring all residents together. Through Unidos en Palestine, we worked to promote community trust and civil engagement, building valuable and lasting relationships.

Reaching out to civic leaders of all backgrounds, including clergy and business leaders, we planned and hosted community events focused on health and safety, life skills, and Hispanic heritage. These events focused on bringing useful information and resources to the immigrant and Spanish speaking community that you and I may take for granted, increasing their quality of life and, therefore, increasing trust. Unidos en Palestine members did not participate only to receive benefits, but also to give back to their community. For example, volunteers taught Spanish to residents wanting to learn the language. This is community in action.

We saw clear benefits to these efforts, with our officers experiencing increased engagement from the Hispanic community, in particular. But in the current polarized political climate, these gains are at risk. If the public receives the message that a broad swath of the community will be targeted for arrest and removal, they will be less willing to come forward and cooperate.

Conclusion

It is essential to maintain community confidence in law enforcement, so that victims of crimes and witnesses – native-born and immigrant alike – are comfortable with coming forward. Proposals to have state and local law enforcement assume immigration enforcement functions that historically have been the purview of the federal government risks undermining community trust. Not to mention, using resources most local law enforcement simply do not have.

Particularly in a time of ramped-up immigration enforcement and increasingly troubling rhetoric surrounding immigration, it is increasingly challenging to law enforcement to win their trust.

My hope is that federal, state, and local governments can work together to strike the right balance, working together to get dangerous criminals off the streets, while promoting community trust to the broader public.

The Senate Judiciary Committee has a central role in maintaining this balance.

As someone who loves this country and the son of a once-undocumented Mexican immigrant, thank you for allowing me to testify about these significant issues.