

« American people see only Latinos as the problem with illegal immigration but it's not the full story | [Main](#) | [Guest Voz: A reflection on 15 years of Immigrant Day in California](#) »

Guest Voz: Deafening silence from our leaders in Washington over immigration reform is incomprehensible

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LatinaLista -- Though the Obama administration has resurrected the issue of immigration reform and President Obama has made speeches around the country as a show of good faith that he's serious about bringing it to the floor of Congress for debate, he is still plagued by one aspect of the larger issue that is increasingly angering the Latino community.



It is called the Secure Communities program. Its main objective is to keep all US residents safe but it has been abused and more and more Latino communities across the country are demanding that their state legislators withdraw from it.

Michael Wildes

Just this week, the Department of Homeland Security's Office of the Inspector General **announced** the decision to investigate the agency's Secure Communities program to clarify the program's objectives, states' involvement and how it is being implemented.

Today's Guest Voz writer, immigration lawyer Michael Wildes, knows only too well how the government and local jurisdictions are implementing this program. He shares his insights on the reasons why Secure Communities isn't working like the federal government promised and what needs to be done.

By [Michael Wildes](#)

President Obama, in dealing with the uphill battle of immigration reform has failed to find a middle ground, in which the safety of our nation through enforcement of our immigration laws is addressed, while simultaneously developing a path of legalization for millions of undocumented immigrants that remain in the U.S.

The development of the "Secure Communities" (S-Comm) program was originally initiated by the Department of Homeland Security in collaboration with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to identify and deport immigrants having been convicted of serious criminal offenses.

The program links itself to local law enforcement agencies and receives fingerprint data from all those who have been taken into custody. If officials discover that a suspect has unlawfully entered the country, or is a non-citizen with a criminal record, ICE may then take further action to deport them. Since its inception, S-Comm has expanded its reach to over 30 states, and federal officials predict that by 2013, every jurisdiction in the country will be using the system.

Search

Search this blog:

Search

[Change.org](#) | [Start Pet](#)

About

This page contains a sin: entry from the blog post [20 de Mayo 2011 2:30](#)

The previous post in this: was [American people se Latinos as the problem \ illegal immigration but i the full story.](#)

The next post in this blc: [Guest Voz: A reflection years of Immigrant Day California.](#)

Many more can be found: the [main index page](#) or looking through [the arch](#)

[Entries RSS](#)

[Comments RSS](#)



However, the government's goal of excising dangerous criminals from American society has been approached in a shockingly reckless and inhumane manner. In practice, the program has been applied through sweeping, non-discriminatory methods resulting in the removal of thousands of non-criminal, undocumented immigrants.

Furthermore, the haste in which S-Comm was implemented gives states little opportunity to contest its provisions, causing much confusion and dissonance among local jurisdictions.

Failing to prioritize the program's focus exclusively on immigrants who present significant security threats to the American people greatly undermines the hard earned relationships that government officials have established within their respective immigrant communities.

Consequently, this creates a slippery slope to racial profiling among certain minority groups by local law enforcement personnel. Looking back, ICE ran into similar problems after implementing the Criminal Alien Program, which dramatically increased the number of pretextual stops by police officers against Hispanics -- exposing a staggering number of immigrant families to deportation who have done no more than live and work peaceably within our borders.

Our nation has historically depended on the immigrant workforce and talent. As our economy struggles to regain its footing, Secure Communities' haphazard approach to bolstering national security seriously stunts progress towards fiscal recovery.

Moreover, broadly attacking any and all undocumented immigrants unduly burdens taxpayers, who must now account for the additional strain on our already limited judicial resources.

Currently, with approximately 700 ICE agents and only 268 immigration judges we can not possibly remove over 15 million undocumented souls. As a practical matter, the American people are much better served by dedicating law enforcement efforts towards initiatives that genuinely ensure public safety, rather than draining funds on excessive deportation proceedings.

Our immigration system is broken and the deafening silence from our leaders in Washington is incomprehensible and a slap in the face of our efforts towards economic reform. If S-Comm continues to be managed so carelessly, the U.S runs a significant risk of damaging our nation's security and economy to the point of no return.

Michael Wildes is a Managing Partner of Wildes & Weinberg P.C., America's preeminent immigration law firm serving international and domestic corporate and individual clients with their U.S. immigration needs. The firm has offices in New York City and Englewood, N.J. Mr. Wildes is a former Federal Prosecutor and recently completed two terms as the Mayor of Englewood, NJ where he resides. Email him at michael@wildeslaw.com or call (212) 753 -3468 if he can be of any assistance to you or someone you know.

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