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E. Bay Immigrant Advocates Angry Over Raids

Uniforms, Methods Of ICE Agents At Issue

(CBS 5 / AP / BCN) RICHMOND

Immigrant advocates say federal agents' use of the word "police" during immigration raids to gain entry to homes is leading to mistrust between immigrants and local law enforcement.

The advocates also say Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents have also detained individuals other than those being sought by National Fugitive Operations Program, a nationwide enforcement action.

Christina Espinosa of Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization, also known as CCISCO, a group of 25 religious organizations, said the tactics of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents are jeopardizing efforts by Richmond police to gain the confidence of the city's immigrant community.

Espinosa said her group and others have been working with Police Chief Chris Magnus on a community policing program aimed at giving immigrants trust in local police.

But she said, "All our efforts are being jeopardized" by the tactics of ICE agents because there's now an atmosphere of fear and mistrust in the community.

Espinosa said agents are dressed in new dark uniforms that make them look like police officers and they use the word "police" to gain access to homes.

She said CCISCO and other groups will hold a community meeting on Sunday to discuss ICE's policies.

Espinosa said that among those promising to attend are Richmond Mayor Gayle McLaughlin, several City Council members and representatives from the Richmond Police Department and the office of Rep George Miller, D-Martinez.

"We want them to put pressure on ICE to stop their aggressive approach," she said.

Espinosa said another purpose of the meeting is to let immigrants know their legal rights.

"If an immigration agent has a warrant, they should open their door for them but if there's isn't a warrant they should not open their door," she said.

ICE spokeswoman Lori Haley says ICE agents were correct to call themselves "police," explaining they are—indeed—federal police and that they often fully identify themselves once they're inside homes.

She said one reason agents use the word "police" is that many immigrants "may have limited understanding of English" but they understand the word "police."

Haley said, "After their initial contact with someone, agents may elaborate on who they are."

Haley denied Espinosa's allegation that agents are engaging in new tactics that are deceitful. "We're doing things the same way we always have," she said. "There is no effort to misrepresent ourselves."

Haley said she's not aware of agents having new uniforms that look like police uniforms and said the primary targets of immigration agents are immigration fugitives who have orders to be deported. Many of them have criminal histories, she said.

"We're a nation of immigrants but we're also a nation of laws," said Haley. "Arrests are not made randomly," and are only made after an order is issued by a judge.

ICE agents "simply enforce orders" from judges, Haley said.

She also said agents have the right to investigate people other than their specific target.

Richmond police spokesman Lt. Mark Gagan said, "This is a complex issue that we will not be able to deal with without sitting down with all the parties involved."

The community meeting will be held at St. Mark's Catholic Church at 159 Harbour Way in Richmond at 3 p.m. on Sunday.

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