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Romney's Decision to Use State Troopers as Immigration Agents Puts Public Safety at Risk

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Boston – Governor Mitt Romney's decision to use state police as federal immigration agents undermines public safety by diverting already limited resources away from crime fighting and by deterring Massachusetts residents from reporting crimes, say lawyers at the ACLU of Massachusetts.

“By undermining community policing efforts, this proposal will make our communities less safe, while increasing the chances that US citizens and legal residents will be subject to illegal racial and ethnic profiling,” said Carol Rose, Executive Director of the ACLU of Massachusetts.

Police chiefs in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Philadelphia, Seattle, Washington DC, and elsewhere have spoken out against commandeering local police to do the work of federal immigration agents. To date, only two states – Florida and Alabama – have chosen to enter into such arrangements with federal immigration authorities.

“Within days of his swearing-in ceremony, Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis publicly opposed this plan,” said Rose. “He knows that using local or state police to do the work of the federal immigration authorities undermines the efforts – and successes – of state and local police who often work together to solve crimes.”

The governor's decision has also been criticized by victims-rights groups, who fear that witnesses and victims of crime will avoid going to the police and putting them or someone in their family in the cross-hairs of federal immigration authorities. There are nearly 11 million naturalized US citizens and more than 25 million native-born citizens of Latin American and Asian descent. In the year 2000, immigrants made up 12.2% of the Massachusetts population, up from 9.5% in 1990. The immigrant population in the Bay State grew by 35% over the course of the decade, reaching 773,000 in 2000.

“As word spreads in newcomer communities that police are acting as immigration agents, immigrants and their family members will be afraid to report crimes,” said Rose. “When crimes go unsolved, the safety of the entire community is compromised.”

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