

John F. Timoney

Miami, Florida

April 29, 2011

Members of the Florida Legislature:

I have served as a law enforcement professional for 41 years of my life, most of that time as a law enforcement executive. I most recently served the City of Miami as Police Chief for seven years (from 2003 – 2010). Prior to that, I served as Commissioner of the Philadelphia Police Department from 1998 – 2002, and prior to that in a number of positions with the New York City Police Department, including as First Deputy Commissioner.

It has been my experience (and that of many other police professionals) that maintaining the trust of immigrants is essential to protecting the public, solving crimes and keeping the peace.

I am very concerned about the potential impact that two bills (HB 7089 and SB 2040) could have on the effectiveness of local police and public safety, particularly in the many areas of Florida that now have significant immigrant populations.

For example, in the city of Miami in 2003, police would have had a tougher time solving the case and removing the infamous Shenandoah serial rapist from the streets of Miami without tips and information from immigrants in the community.

Without such trust, immigrants, regardless of status, will not cooperate with police or report even serious crimes, like armed robbery or domestic violence. Legal immigrants will not cooperate with the police if they fear that they, or their relatives or friends will be deported. This would lead to greater crime and degrades the quality of life for the broader community.

If passed, these bills would undermine the trust that many local police chiefs have established with the immigrant communities in their cities over the years. A recent Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) report well states: “Active involvement in immigration enforcement can complicate local law enforcement agencies’ efforts to fulfill their primary missions of investigating and preventing crime.” [1]

This concern is shared, as the report notes, by most police chiefs who “recognize that much is at stake, including the willingness of a crime victim to report the crime, the willingness of a witness to step forward and provide information, and the continued support of the community.” The report concludes with the chiefs’ recommendations, among them:

[1] Debra A. Hoffmaster, *Police and Immigration: How Chiefs Are Leading their Communities through the Challenges*. Police Executive Research Forum, Washington, D.C. March 2011.
<http://www.policeforum.org/library/immigration/PERFImmigrationReportMarch2011.pdf>

- Officers should be prohibited from arresting or detaining persons for the sole purpose of investigating their immigration status.
- Officers should arrest persons who violate the criminal laws of their jurisdictions without regard to the immigration status of the alleged perpetrator or the victim.
- Local police must uphold the Constitutional and civil rights of persons regardless of their immigration status.
- Local police must protect crime victims and witnesses regardless of their immigration status, and should encourage all victims and witnesses to report crimes, regardless of their immigration status.

I ask you to consider the public safety issues at stake for communities throughout Florida. The proposed legislation will drive a dangerous wedge between law enforcement and immigrants in Florida that will make the job of our police officers to protect the public more difficult.

The proposed legislation threatens public safety. I ask you to reject HB 7089 and SB 2040.

Sincerely,

John F. Timoney
Former Police Chief, City of Miami