

# IMMIGRANTS, POLICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

*A Community Study about Why Immigrants Do Not  
Trust Local Law Enforcement in Miami-Dade County*



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Immigrants in Miami-Dade County are Afraid to Get Help from Law Enforcement**

In a two-week period during the summer of 2009, the Florida Immigrant Coalition, WeCount! and several other immigrant rights organizations collected community safety surveys in order to measure the level of fear in immigrant communities in Miami and how much this fear prevented immigrants from seeking help from government agencies. The survey results showed:

- 56% of immigrants surveyed reported being afraid to go to government agencies (police, fire department, emergency rooms) for help.
- The fear was not limited to undocumented immigrants. 37% of legal permanent residents and 15% of immigrants who had become US citizens surveyed also expressed a similar fear of seeking help.
- When asked the reason for this fear, 30% specifically cited collaboration between local law enforcement and ICE (the federal agency primarily charged with enforcing immigration laws).
- The fear was not based on the rumor-mill. Individuals that knew someone (or multiple people) that had been deported were more likely to fear going to government agencies for help.
- The fear was not limited to recent immigrants. 43% of immigrants that had lived in the US for over 10 years expressed a fear of going to government agencies for help.

### **Immigrant Rights Groups Blame “Secure Communities” and other ICE-Collaborations For Level of Fear**

Despite the immigrant-friendly reputation of most local law enforcement agencies, there are noted examples of local law enforcement collaboration with ICE that are propelling this fear. The most significant:

- Local police detain immigrants and turning them over to ICE after hits on the NCIC database (a national law enforcement database) for civil immigration violations (e.g., outstanding orders of removal).
- Local police accompany ICE on home raids to arrest individuals with civil immigration violations.
- The county Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation turns arrested immigrants over to ICE, even before they have been convicted of any crimes, or in some cases, even when they are never convicted of a crime.

By ICE's own statistics, collaborations in Miami Dade County such as "Secure Communities" that are meant to target the "most dangerous criminal aliens" are actually targeting low-level offenders, and in some cases non-offenders. Only 17% of immigrants deported under "Secure Communities" in Miami-Dade County and 12% deported under the program nationwide fit ICE's target group of "the most dangerous criminal aliens." Neither ICE nor any Miami-Dade law enforcement agency has provided data for how many people deported under collaboration programs such as "Secure Communities" have been completely exonerated of any criminal act.

As we have seen in Arizona, a small amount of ICE collaboration with local law enforcement agencies is a slippery slope to completely eroding the trust of immigrants. In a place like Miami-Dade County, losing the trust of immigrants makes law enforcement lose its ability to truly serve and protect our community.