



MontCo welcomes illegals, as neighbors crack down

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(Andrew Harnik/Examiner file)

Montgomery County is opening its doors to illegal immigrants as its neighbors around the Washington region crack down on them.

While counties across the area are slamming their doors shut to illegals through federal enforcement, Montgomery County's communication with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials is limited to a weekly fax of names. And now the county is fighting an effort to crack down statewide.

The county's Department of Corrections sends the name of every inmate detained on charges of violent crime — without regard to their immigration status — to ICE weekly, according to county spokesman Patrick Lacefield.

"If the arrest is not for [violent crime], then ICE will NOT be contacted, regardless of the individual's legal status and/or gang affiliation," county policy reads.

Montgomery's policies are "downright laissez faire," said Howard County sheriff's spokesman Mark Verderaine, who added that he believes Howard is too soft on illegal immigrants as well.

The Center for Immigration Studies, a think tank that supports low immigration, called it a "dangerous sanctuary policy."

Montgomery's neighboring counties, Frederick and Prince George's, are reining in illegal immigration through federal enforcement programs.

Frederick uses the federal 287(g) program, which gives local police the power to identify, investigate and detain illegal immigrants.

Frederick Sheriff Charles Jenkins said the 18 correctional officers and 10 law enforcement officers trained under 287(g) have identified more than 600 illegal immigrants since implementing the program two years ago.

He has pointed to Montgomery's lack of enforcement as a reason for Frederick's problems with illegals. "People that commit crimes don't recognize jurisdictional boundaries," he said.

Maryland Del. Patrick L. McDonough is sponsoring a bill in the General Assembly that would implement 287(g) statewide in Maryland, which is being fought by Montgomery's state lawmakers.

"I think it may lead to racial profiling," said Montgomery County Del. Susan C. Lee, D-Bethesda.

She added she was worried about creating a state of fear so illegals wouldn't report crimes. "Illegal immigrants aren't just criminals, they can also be victims."

McDonough said Montgomery's policies have made the county a safe haven for gangs, making it more difficult in his district, Baltimore County, to fight gang violence.

"The gateway into this state creating problems with illegals is Montgomery," said McDonough, a Republican. "[Montgomery's] open-door policy has caused a lot of violence in the state."

He also is concerned that an influx of illegals will flow across the Potomac River once Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell expands the 287(g) program throughout his state.

Illegals "are going to leave the ship and come over here," McDonough said.

Corey Stewart, chairman of Prince William County's Board of Supervisors, said his county has dumped a number of illegals into Montgomery since implementing 287(g) in 2007.

"Clearly what happened in Prince William County is that a lot of the illegal immigrants are leaving and going to Montgomery," he said, citing the increase in Montgomery's gang-related crimes over the past several years. Meanwhile, Prince William's crime rate has dropped 38 percent.

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Cracking down on illegal immigrants

- » Prince George's County: Uses Secure Communities, a new federal program that requires all inmates' fingerprints to be submitted to an FBI and Department of Homeland Security database.
- » Fairfax County: Uses Secure Communities.
- » Frederick County: Uses the federal 287(g) program.
- » Anne Arundel County correctional officers contact ICE within 24 hours if they can't determine whether an inmate is in the United States illegally, according to police department policy documents.
- » Calvert County: Officers have full discretion in dealing with illegal immigrants, said Assistant Sheriff Lt. Col. Tom Hejl.