

## OPINION

# Guest Commentary: Building a culture of trust with the immigrant community

*By Stanley Garnett*

POSTED: 09/18/2015 05:00:00 PM MDT [67 COMMENTS](#)



Stanley Garnett, Boulder County district attorney

As a local law enforcement leader, I've been concerned with the rhetoric around the issue of "sanctuary cities."

Congress has been debating the possibility of legislation to deny federal funding to "sanctuary cities." Now, "sanctuary city" is a loaded term and the definition varies. It appears certain members of Congress intend to pass federal legislation to punish cities and local communities that have adopted policies aimed at building trust in the immigrant communities.

The problem with this approach is that it is exactly the opposite of what the U.S. government should be doing to help us maintain public safety.

Four years ago, my office, in Colorado's 20th Judicial District, put the Immigrant Protection Initiative in place to assure the immigrant community that my office and local law enforcement in Boulder County will prosecute crimes committed against immigrant victims regardless of the status of the immigrant.

We have a program of active outreach to the immigrant community, including education programs in Spanish and other languages designed to warn of crime patterns and explain our legal system's parameters and functions to those unfamiliar with the system.

All of this outreach is meant to show that law enforcement can be trusted. This is especially important for people who come from countries with corrupt or ineffective police or government agencies, and the goal has been to assure immigrants that they can give us their trust.

As the district attorney, I know how important witnesses and victims are to a prosecution's case. With programs in place, like our initiative, more cases can be solved because the fear of coming forward is diminished.

One of the most rewarding aspects of our program is helping people who have been victimized seriously and afraid to report. In 2012, we met a woman from Central America who had worked cleaning buildings in Boulder and had been sexually assaulted by her boss repeatedly for a long period of time. He threatened to have her deported if she ever reported the assaults, telling her the police didn't care and no one would do anything. When she heard of our program from a friend, she developed the courage to come forward, supported by a mobile phone recording of one of the assaults. Following a thorough investigation by Boulder police, charges were filed and her tormentor was convicted, taking this dangerous rapist off the streets.

Does this mean we are a "sanctuary" district attorney's office? If so, I proudly accept that title.

The reality is that developing a culture of such trust helps build a climate of public safety. Those who work in law enforcement have long known that unless the people who live in our communities are confident that crimes can safely be reported to police, criminals will prey on vulnerable communities and take advantage of their fears. As a direct result of our commitment to building a culture of trust, we have handled hundreds of investigations and have filed and pursued dozens of felony cases with immigrant victims, documented and undocumented, who were targeted for crimes as varied as wage theft, fraud, theft, sexual assault, extortion and assault. The result of our program has been a reduction of crime overall and a safer community for everyone.

Punishing localities that have adopted commonsense law enforcement policies because certain congressional offices have deemed them to be "sanctuary cities" is irrational and

has been opposed by the National Association of Sheriffs, Major Cities Chiefs Association, Fraternal Order of Police, Major County Sheriffs Association and leaders across the country. A goal of law enforcement should be to encourage public cooperation with investigations. To accomplish this goal requires the trust and confidence of everyone.

Our country is long overdue for a meaningful comprehensive immigration reform and I hope that Congress moves forward to meet the goal of an immigration bill in the near future that will offer safety and security and a path forward for the undocumented. In the meantime, Congress should stop making things worse by attacking local law enforcement officials doing their best to keep everyone safe.

*Stanley Garnett is district attorney for Boulder County.*

*To send a letter to the editor about this article, submit [online](#) or check out our [guidelines](#) for how to submit by e-mail or mail.*