

Santa Cruz council votes against opt-out of immigration reporting system: Majority says city shouldn't interfere with how county responds to federal program

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Body

May 11--**SANTA CRUZ** -- The City **Council** on Tuesday **voted** not to support state legislation that would allow local authorities to **opt out** of a federal **immigration reporting**-and-detention program that opponents say is designed to deport undocumented residents rather than just violent offenders.

The 4-3 **vote** demonstrates a shift in the **council** majority that has been under way for the past several years, with city leaders now less likely to weigh in on controversial national issues in favor of focusing on problems within the city's jurisdiction.

The decision not to support Assembly Bill 1081, which would require local jailing authorities to decide whether to participate in the Department of Homeland Security's Secure Communities program, also stands in contrast to the city's status for three decades as a so-called sanctuary city, where resources won't be used toward deportation.

The city is not directly subject to the Secure Communities program because the Sheriff's Office is the agency charged with relaying fingerprint information from people booked in County Jail to state and federal officials who check their **immigration** status. Still, dozens of the bill's supporters left shaking their heads Tuesday after a series of symbolic resolutions failed to bring the split **council** together.

"What it says to me is that the **council** does support injustice and racial inequality in **Santa Cruz**," Krysta Villeda, a fourth-year UC **Santa Cruz** student.

Villeda was among

several dozen people holding signs that expressed sentiments such as "No One is Illegal" and "Justice for All." One of them, Karina Cervantez, a daughter of immigrants, said, "For someone to tell me that fear doesn't exist" of police working with federal authorities, "we feel it."

Mayor Ryan Coonerty and **council** members Lynn Robinson, David Terrazas and Hilary Bryant said they were reluctant to pass a resolution by Councilman Tony Madrigal that urged county officials not to detain people on **immigration** holds unless they are suspected of a serious or violent crime and have access to an **immigration** attorney.

Although the county Board of Supervisors has supported revising Secure Communities, the **council** majority said it did not believe the city should advise the sheriff on the federal program.

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"This is not a good way to do policy," Coonerty said about the resolution Madrigal authored in concert with a local advocacy group called Immigration Action Group.

Instead, Coonerty offered a general statement urging federal, state and county officials "to protect public safety and civil liberties." The council unanimously passed it, though Councilwoman Katherine Beiers said it was largely meaningless considering the council often takes more positioned stances on other state legislation.

Beiers, Madrigal and Vice Mayor Don Lane voted in favor of Lane's follow-up motion to simply support AB 1081 without adding language about when the sheriff should comply with immigration holds. But the majority also voted it down.

"Our country is in desperate need of complete immigration reform," Bryant said in explaining her vote. "We can't have a policy that asks them to do jobs and then throw them out. But it needs to start at a different level."

Opponents of Secure Communities say the policy was designed to pursue violent felons but has been used as a tool for deportation of nonviolent undocumented residents.

Daniel Dodge Jr., son of Watsonville's mayor, said Secure Communities is "eroding trust between the immigrant community and local law enforcement" because immigrants who are victims of or witnesses to crimes will fear deportation if they cooperate with police.

However, resident Michael Becker urged the council not to support the opt-out option, saying cooperating with immigration authorities helped track drug dealers who frequented the Pogonip, as well as suspects in the 2009 gang-related slaying of teenager Tyler Tenorio.

"For public officials to attempt to undermine the law of our land seems problematic at the least," Becker said.

Chief Kevin Vogel said the drug dealers and homicide suspects were not apprehended through the Secure Communities program, but rather a separate operation on gangs conducted by local police and immigration officials.

Vogel said he didn't have a position about the debate over Secure Communities, saying it was a "political issue." He said the federal program "hasn't changed one bit how we do our job" because the department has a policy not to inquire about immigration status while interacting with potential suspects.

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