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New York Advocates Celebrate Suspension of Controversial Deportation Program “Secure Communities”

New York, NY (June 1, 2011) – A wide coalition of immigrant advocacy groups today applauded Governor Cuomo for suspending the mass deportation program known as “Secure Communities.” This news makes New York the second state in the country to withdraw from the controversial program.

“Governor Cuomo has taken a momentous step towards keeping families together and protecting the rights of our immigrant communities,” said Michelle Fei of the Immigrant Defense Project. “Withdrawing from Secure Communities is the only sensible solution.”

“We are grateful that Cuomo has heard our communities’ concerns and has responded by making New York safer for all New Yorkers,” said Javier H. Valdés of Make the Road New York. “Secure Communities represents a dragnet approach to deportation that diminishes trust between immigrants and local law enforcement.”

“We are greatly encouraged that Governor Cuomo has recognized that Secure Communities erodes trust with the police, encourages racial profiling, and funnels immigrants into an unjust deportation system,” said Mizue Aizeki of the Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights. “This program never did and never will belong in New York.”

“This moratorium will halt the spread of a program that was sold as a safety measure but instead made New York less safe by making vulnerable New Yorkers afraid to call the police for help or to report a crime,” said New York Civil Liberties Union Executive Director Donna Lieberman. “Instead of protecting us, Secure Communities has been used as a shortcut to deportation.”

“Governor Cuomo has shown real moral authority by ending New York’s participation in Secure Communities,” said Ravi Ragbir of the New Sanctuary Coalition. “We pray that other governors across the country will follow the example set by Illinois and New York.”

Since Secure Communities, which is run by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), was signed into effect a year ago in New York, advocates have called upon both Governors Paterson and Cuomo to end the state’s participation, calling it an unjust dragnet that tears New York families apart and destroys the trust between police and the communities they serve.

Nationally, ICE has come under fire for lack of transparency and accountability in its administration of the program. Two weeks ago, a letter released by a former ICE contractor confirmed that ICE intentionally misled New York to obtain the state’s participation in Secure Communities.

“Especially given ICE’s own admissions about the way in which it has deceived states, including New York, about Secure Communities, there is simply no reason why any jurisdiction should participate,” said Center for Constitutional Rights’ Sunita Patel, one of the attorneys who had sued ICE to release documents about the program. “No state should trust an agency that has acted so duplicitously in its dealings.”

Cuomo's decision joins a groundswell of opposition against the program. In recent weeks, Illinois Governor Quinn rescinded its agreement to participate in Secure Communities, U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren Sen. Menendez called for an investigation of ICE and the Department of Homeland Security, and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus urged Pres. Obama to stop Secure Communities immediately. In New York, 38 state legislators – joined by US Congress Members Serrano and Velasquez – called upon Governor Cuomo to terminate the State's Secure Communities agreement while religious leaders and advocates held vigils and rallies demanding an end to the program.

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The New York State Working Group Against Deportation is a broad coalition of domestic violence, immigrant rights, family services, labor, faith-based, civil rights, and community-based organizations that aims to stop Secure Communities and other deportation programs.