



Yuma County Sheriff's Office

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PRESS RELEASE

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DHS - Priority Enforcement Program Rebuttal from Sheriff Wilmot

Location of Incident: Yuma, AZ

This week, Sheriff Leon Wilmot was notified by the National Sheriff's Association that his rebuttal letter to Homeland Security Director Jeh Johnson letter concerning current border security had been published in this month's National Sheriff's Association magazine.

*I recently became aware of an article submitted by Homeland Security Director Jeh Johnson to the National Sheriff's Association for publication in their magazine. As Sheriff of Yuma County, Chairman of the NSA Immigration and Border Security Committee, President of the Arizona Sheriff's Association, member of the Southwestern Border Sheriff's Coalition, I felt that it was my duty to submit a response to the article from a **law enforcement** perspective. I would like to preface this release by saying that this is **not** about **immigration** but rather border security.*

In his article, "Priority Enforcement Program – How DHS is focusing on Deporting Felons," Homeland Security Director Jeh Johnson discusses the end of the Secure Communities program and its replacement, the "Priority Enforcement Program". Secretary Johnson skillfully attempts to convince the reader that the "Priority Enforcement Program" will achieve what the Secure Communities program failed to do and that is keep our streets safe. He "believes" that every governor, mayor, state legislature, city council and county commission share in that goal with himself and the President. What his article does not include is any dialogue with local and state law enforcement agencies or County Sheriffs, specifically sheriffs serving in counties along the U.S./Mexico border even though they are in the epicenter of the border crisis. Furthermore, there is no mention of the financial impacts on local and state law enforcement agencies or any discussions of the impact this new program would have on those who are on the front lines. Yuma County alone has seen a cost of \$800,000 and expects an increase to continue because The United States Attorney Office will not and has refused to prosecute drug smugglers in which majority of these cases the smugglers entered the country illegally. These types of crimes are not going to go unpunished in Yuma County, we are committed to prosecuting these people, but the unfortunate reality is that it is a federal responsibility and should be a federal expense. Yuma County had the worst record in the United States for illegal entries by undocumented immigrants and as a result, our community suffered numerous ancillary crimes. Several federal programs, such as the Secure Communities program and Operation Streamline, were put into place and had a significant impact on curtailing the criminal activity in our county. However, the recent changes made by our federal administration have left a significant burden on local governments not only to bear the costs associated with the apprehension, prosecution, and

incarceration of criminal illegal aliens, but to also insure that this criminal element is not released back into society to continue to prey on our citizens. Furthermore, state and local resources which have become necessary to address the criminal activity by these criminals and its effects on our communities have also been burdened to the point of exhaustion and aggravation. How does all this translate in actual dollars? During 2014, Arizona Sheriffs requested reimbursement through the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP) for cost incurred in housing criminal aliens. The costs totaled approximately 30 million dollars of which our "federal partners" reimbursed Arizona Sheriffs 1.2 million dollars which is equivalent to 4.8 cents on the dollar.

The federal administration is announcing their "Priority Enforcement Program" as a replacement for the "ineffective" Secure Communities program. According to Director Johnson, the goal of this new program is "...to better focus our immigration enforcement resources on convicted criminals over undocumented immigrants who have been here for years, have committed no serious crimes, and, have, in effect, become peaceful and integrated members of the community." That statement in itself is contradictory in nature. As I read it, the following words stood out: "undocumented immigrants"; "no serious crime"; and "peaceful and integrated members of the community." Now, let's look at this statement from a law enforcement perspective.

- 1) Undocumented immigrant: Isn't it a crime to enter into the United States illegally?*
- 2) No serious crime: Isn't it still a crime to break the laws of our nation and states, regardless of the seriousness of the crime?*
- 3) Peaceful and integrated member of society: If someone is arrested and prosecuted for committing a crime, can they really be classified as a "peaceful and integrated member of society"?*

As law enforcement officers, we are sworn to uphold the Constitution of the United States of America and the laws of our respective states. I firmly believe that the laws of our nation and our states apply to everyone, regardless of their legal (or illegal) status and as such, they should be fully enforced on everyone. In other words, "If you do the crime, you do the time." So I have to ask, "At what point did it become ok NOT to enforce these laws on criminal aliens?" Keep in mind that these are the same laws that we expect our citizens to abide by, just as we expect them to bear the consequences when they break these laws and commit crimes.

The bottom line is that the new Priority Enforcement Program will be just another program that will continue to burden the finances and resources of state and local law enforcement agencies that must step in to enforce the laws that our federal partners should be enforcing. Enforcing our laws in order to secure our border is not an option.

Click link for DHS Secretary Jey Johnson's article: [Priority Enforcement Program - How DHS is Focusing on Deporting Felons](#) (NSA Sheriff Magazine)

Click link for Sheriff Leon Wilmot's rebuttal letter: [Rebuttal to Department of Homeland Security's Focus on Deporting Felons](#) (NSA Sheriff Magazine)

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