

# The Daily Review

## Congress must take action now on immigration reform

By Gregory Ahern and Richard Valle, Oakland Tribune My Word © 2013 Bay Area News Group

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Inaction is no longer an option. Washington needs to begin making progress on issues important to our nation. Inaction is costing families, communities, businesses and local governments; our national economy and progress are harmed when Congress delays tough decisions.

State and local government are where the rubber meets the road; this is where policy is implemented and services are provided to residents.

California is becoming a majority-minority state and Alameda County is home to persons of diverse racial, ethnic and national backgrounds, including many immigrants.

Approximately 31 percent of all county residents are foreign born, approximately 43 percent speak a language other than English at home, and approximately 55 percent of children in the county live in families with at least one foreign-born parent.

On Jan. 1, 2014, Assembly Bill 4, the Trust Act, will become law. Gov. Jerry Brown signed this legislation into law that is intended to protect immigrants' due process and equal protections. Additionally, the act provides local law enforcement the control to protect Californians from those who truly pose a public safety threat.

AB4 provides for improved local decision-making and helps avoid costs from an unfunded federal mandate.

Locally, in Alameda County, we lent our voice to this dialogue. In April 2013, the Board of Supervisors passed a resolution that the board does not support any law enforcement policy that denies due process or equal protection based on an individual's civil immigration status.

Furthermore, the Alameda County sheriff met with the governor on these issues to provide law enforcement's and our county's priorities to ensure public safety. These discussions are complicated by the ambiguity that still exists with respect to the interpretation of federal immigration laws.

The federal law pertaining to immigration detainees contains a clause stating that sheriffs, among other law enforcement officials, "shall maintain custody of the alien" continues to present a quandary for sheriffs throughout the nation. These inconsistencies create confusion in our local communities.

Now it is time for the federal government to enact comprehensive immigration reform, so that people can come out of the shadows and local government agencies can better serve the public.

According to a recent Migration Policy Institute report, the federal government spends more on civil immigration enforcement than all federal criminal law enforcement combined. Yet, both Democrats and Republicans agree that the immigration system is broken and in need of repair.

Reports have surfaced that we should not expect any action from our federal elected representatives on this issue this year.

Unlike the current federal government, at the local level, inaction is not an option. The sheriff cannot delay decisions on where to deploy deputies. The Board of Supervisors cannot delay in balancing and adopting a budget. We take seriously and accept the responsibility that comes with the oath we took to support the Constitution of the United States and the state of California, and to faithfully discharge the duties of our office.

We are also a nation of immigrants, many of which are hardworking and have added value to our society. It is time for Congress to get to work without further delay of making the hard decisions that must be made to fix our broken immigration system.

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