

Responding to Increased Federal Immigration Enforcement

Community-Driven Guidance for the King County Sheriff's Office

Prepared in Collaboration with:

The Arc of King County, Congolese Integration Network, Eastside for All, Look2Justice, People Power Washington, and Urban Family



King County
OLEO

OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OVERSIGHT

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The King County Office of Law Enforcement Oversight provides independent oversight of the King County Sheriff’s Office. We conduct objective reviews and independent investigations, and make evidence-based policy recommendations that are guided by the community and rooted in equity. To make these recommendations, we partner and collaborate with community-based organizations.

Executive Summary

In 2025, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) began increasing immigration arrests on the street, in workplaces, at courthouses, and at other community sites like parking lots and schools.¹ As ICE arrests have intensified, arrests of people without criminal convictions have increased, and community members and advocates have formed coalitions to demand action and protect immigrants from violent ICE tactics.²

King County has responded by implementing new laws to prevent ICE from conducting immigration enforcement on County property.³ The King County Sheriff's Office (Sheriff's Office) has adopted new policies restricting cooperation with federal immigration enforcement agencies and requiring deputies to document federal immigration enforcement activity in King County.⁴

In this report, the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight (OLEO) [and its community partners](#) examine the current landscape of local law enforcements' response to federal immigration enforcement in King County and provide seven recommendations informed by community outreach. The recommendations aim to expand on the Sheriff's Office existing policies and practices to address community fears, questions, and calls to action.

Community members expressed significant fear of federal immigration enforcement and confusion regarding the Sheriff's Office's role or interaction with federal immigration enforcement activity. OLEO recommends that the Sheriff's Office strengthen its response to federal immigration enforcement encounters by **requiring deputies to intervene to stop excessive force, developing new practices to help move abandoned vehicles from roadways when a driver has been detained by ICE, and updating supervisors' responsibilities to ensure full documentation of incidents.**

Increasing communication and transparency with community members can also lessen individuals' fears and create ongoing opportunities for feedback to improve department policies and practices. Therefore, OLEO recommends that the Sheriff's Office **expand their outreach methods for community education, publish findings from internal reviews of technology contracts, and publicly document information received on federal immigration enforcement agencies' whereabouts in King County.**

Finally, it is vital that the Sheriff's Office policy language can be understood by public audiences, so that community members clearly understand the Sheriff's Office's role in federal immigration enforcement. OLEO recommends that the Sheriff's Office **clarify current policy language for public audiences to better explain circumstances where the Sheriff's Office would work with federal agencies who separately conduct immigration enforcement.**

Recommendations

1.	Create a policy in consultation with legal advisors and community members directing deputies to intervene when they observe federal law enforcement agents engaging in unlawful excessive force.
2.	Continue to expand outreach to meet community needs, improve accessibility, and answer questions about immigration enforcement practices.
3.	Complete and publish audits of technology and data software contracts to ensure policy compliance and share contract details with OLEO.
4.	Partner with immigrant service networks to create a protocol for moving abandoned vehicles from roads to avoid the harms associated with towing and impounding when there are verified reports that a federal immigration enforcement agency has detained the driver.
5.	Track and regularly publish readily available information on federal immigration enforcement activity in King County without increasing communication with federal immigration enforcement agencies.
6.	Clarify the responsibilities of supervisors and require additional deputies to be present when responding to federal immigration enforcement activities to ensure full documentation of incidents.
7.	Remove the term “criminal immigration enforcement” from Sheriff’s Office policy and replace it with language that better captures the circumstances where the Sheriff’s Office may engage with federal law enforcement agencies.

Introduction

Federal Immigration Enforcement Arrests are Increasing, Alongside Legal Challenges and Illegal Detentions

Under the second Trump administration, there has been a dramatic increase in interior immigration enforcement, which is immigration enforcement occurring within the United States away from the national border.⁵ Prior to 2025, ICE arrests were mostly made up of transfers of custody from jails or prisons, which is when noncitizens who have been arrested for crimes are moved into immigration detention facilities. ICE rarely utilized street arrests (i.e., arrests made outside of jail transfers) before 2025. In 2025, however, the number of street arrests by ICE multiplied by 11 times.⁶ ICE has also started arresting

people without criminal convictions at increased rates, including people voluntarily appearing at ICE check-ins or immigration court hearings.⁷ Washington state has been impacted by this increased enforcement, with arrest numbers increasing by the largest margins in King, Yakima, and Clark counties.⁸

This uptick in enforcement has been coupled with illegal detentions, misconduct complaints, and community demands for action.⁹ Courts around the country have ruled that the federal government is violating long-standing law and detaining people illegally in thousands of cases.¹⁰ Uses of force by ICE have increased, including six fatal shootings since March of 2025.¹¹ Courts have taken action to restrain ICE from using force against protestors exercising their first amendment rights following claims that ICE agents fired chemical munitions at peaceful protestors.¹²

It is vital that the Sheriff's Office strengthen its existing procedures around federal immigration enforcement and create a strategy for responding to the increased ICE presence. **This report from OLEO was completed in partnership with [The Arc of King County](#), [Congolesse Integration Network](#), [Eastside For All](#), [Look2Justice](#), [People Power Washington](#), and [Urban Family](#). OLEO and its community partners aim to provide the Sheriff's Office with recommendations on how to respond to increased federal immigration enforcement within its jurisdiction.**

OLEO and its community partners created an online survey and held listening sessions to gather feedback and perspectives from King County community members. The outreach findings provided an important look into the effects of increased federal immigration enforcement on King County communities, and revealed what questions and recommendations community members have for the Sheriff's Office and OLEO. OLEO reviewed the Sheriff's Office's current policies as well as existing King County laws that restrict federal immigration enforcement locally and consulted with Sheriff's Office personnel to gain additional context. OLEO's recommendations are also informed by research on emerging practices for responding to increased federal immigration enforcement in peer jurisdictions.

Washington State and King County Have Adopted Policy Protections for Immigrants, but Still Face Increasing ICE Presence

In addition to judicial rulings, state and municipal lawmakers have stepped in to pass policies protecting immigrants' rights. In 2019, Washington legislators passed the Keep Washington Working Act.¹³ Among other protections for immigrant communities, the Keep Washington Working Act restricts the extent to which local law enforcement agencies can collaborate with federal immigration enforcement agencies.¹⁴ King County legislators have

also written protections for immigrants into the King County Code (KCC). KCC 2.15 prevents County funds and resources from being used on federal immigration enforcement efforts.¹⁵

In February and March of 2026, King County adopted additional protections against increasingly aggressive federal immigration enforcement tactics. The King County Council passed an Ordinance restricting the use of County-owned and controlled property for civil immigration enforcement operations.^{16, a} The Ordinance directs the Sheriff's Office to advise federal immigration enforcement agents that they cannot use County-owned or controlled property for civil immigration enforcement, and to document any violations of the Ordinance.¹⁷ Furthermore, the King County Executive passed an Executive Order directing the Sheriff's Office to develop guidance about its "planned response to potential unlawful action by federal officers," and publish materials and resources related to the role of the Sheriff's Office.¹⁸

The Sheriff's Office Adopted Policies Aligned with State and Local Protections

The Sheriff's Office adopted language aligned with the Keep Washington Working Act to restrict engagement with civil immigration enforcement in March 2025 and updated in March 2026.¹⁹ Sheriff's Office policy (GOM 5.05.000) prohibits department members from using time, money, or resources to facilitate civil immigration enforcement, and provides a list of specific prohibited actions.²⁰

If the Sheriff's Office receives a request for assistance or information from a federal immigration enforcement agent, they must immediately inform the department Legal Advisor or the Command Duty Officer.²¹ The Legal Advisor or the Command Duty Officer is required to log these requests into the Immigration-Related Request/Activity Form.²² This log is public record and can be requested by members of the public.²³

To respond to the King County Ordinance and Executive Order, the Sheriff's Office published another policy (GOM 5.05.100) in April 2026 on responding to federal immigration enforcement.²⁴ This policy requires deputies to activate their body-worn cameras before interacting with federal agents or community members during immigration-related incidents.²⁵ Deputies are required to document and report incidents of federal immigration enforcement activity to a supervisor. Sheriff's Office supervisors are also expected to respond to the scene and notify others in the chain of command. **While the policy requires deputies to request that individuals claiming to be federal**

^a "Civil immigration enforcement" is defined as "actions taken by federal immigration authorities to investigate, apprehend, detain, or remove individuals based solely on alleged violations of federal civil immigration law." See King County Sheriff's Office, "GOM 5.05.100 Response to Federal Immigration Enforcement Activities," April 2026, <https://public.powerdms.com/KCSO/tree/documents/1861411>.

immigration enforcement provide identification, credentials, and warrant information, they cannot compel the federal agents to provide information or obstruct their operations. If a member of the Sheriff's Office were to observe federal agents use excessive force, the policy tells them to prioritize de-escalation, observe and record the incident using their body-worn camera, and notify a supervisor. Deputies are also instructed to provide information and resources or referrals to community members on the scene. Supervisors are responsible for determining whether an incident should be referred to the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office for potential legal action.

The Sheriff's Office Website Highlights Policies and Resources

The Sheriff's Office has published an overview of its immigration-related policy and answered Frequently Asked Questions [on its website](#). The information was translated into 16 languages, and community members can request other translations at no cost by contacting Sheriff@kingcounty.gov. [On the Frequently Asked Questions webpage](#), the Sheriff's Office highlights community organizations that can provide further resources and support to impacted communities, including [Northwest Immigrant Rights Project](#), [Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network](#), and [OneAmerica](#).

The Sheriff's Office also administers a [U and T Visa Program](#). U and T Visas offer protection to immigrants who are victims of serious crimes while also helping law enforcement detect, investigate, and prosecute crime.²⁶ The Sheriff's Office partners with community organizations to share information about the U and T Visa Program.²⁷ Advocates and community members can contact the program directly by emailing KCSOUvisa@kingcounty.gov or calling 206-263-3199 to learn more.

King County Community Members Express Fears Around Immigration Enforcement and Ask for Clarity

The aggressive increase in scale and tactics employed by federal immigration enforcement agencies have created fear and disapproval among Americans.²⁸ One poll found that 62% percent of Americans believe that ICE's actions are making Americans less safe.²⁹

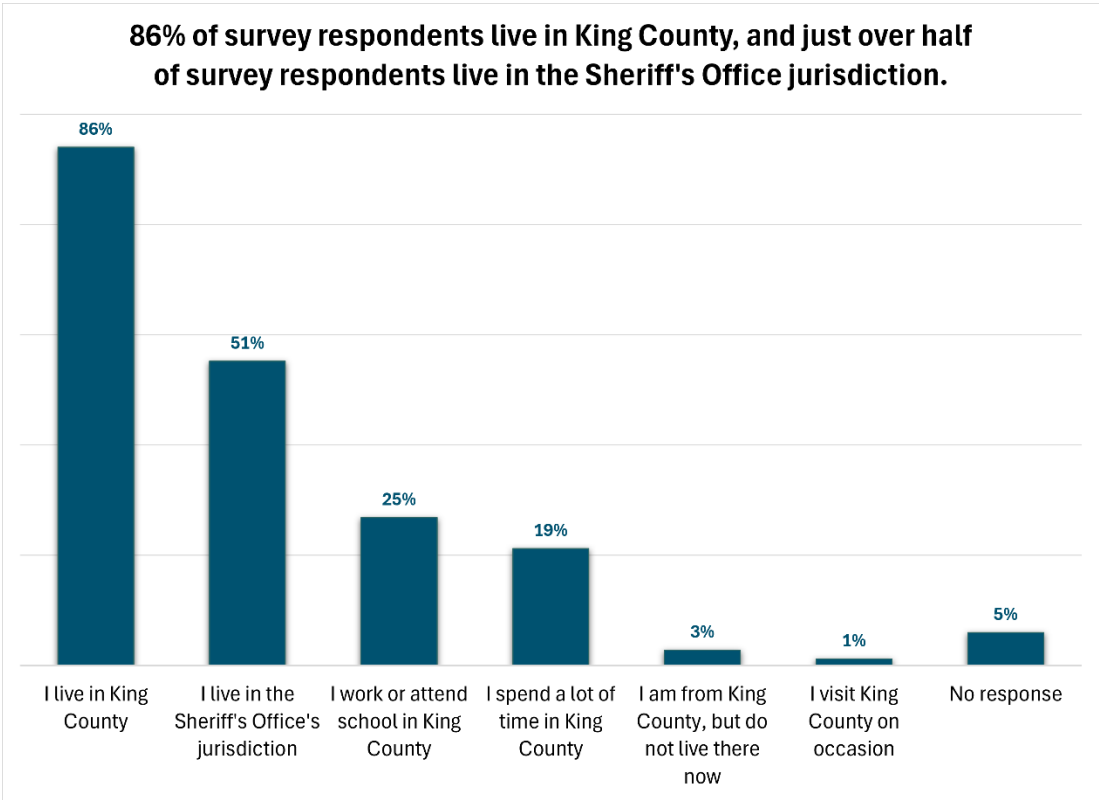
To hear the perspectives of King County residents and impacted communities in the Sheriff's Office jurisdiction,^b OLEO and its community partners created an online survey and held listening sessions on the topic of immigration enforcement. The online survey was open from March 16, 2026 to April 30, 2026, and participants were able to respond

^b "Sheriff's Office jurisdiction" refers to unincorporated King County and the contract cities of Beaux Arts Village, Burien, Carnation, Covington, Kenmore, Maple Valley, Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, Newcastle, North Bend, Sammamish, SeaTac, Shoreline, Skykomish, and Woodinville. The King County International Airport and Metro and Sound Transit agencies are also included in the Sheriff's Office jurisdiction.

anonymously. The survey was also translated into Spanish. OLEO’s community partners distributed the survey to their networks. OLEO also shared the survey with all cities that contract for services with the Sheriff’s Office and additional community organizations. Of the 273 people who took the survey, 181 left comments, resulting in 5,809 responses to survey questions and 1,040 open-ended comments.

Respondents were not required to disclose demographic information to participate in the survey, however, roughly two-thirds of the survey respondents answered demographic questions, offering a glimpse into who took the survey. When asked how they accessed the survey, survey respondents identified 14 different sources through which they learned about the survey (i.e., Facebook, a community organization, a Councilmember’s newsletter, etc.). The wide range of distribution sources resulted in a more diverse set of survey respondents when compared to prior OLEO surveys.³⁰

Most survey respondents lived in King County (86%) and a slight majority of respondents lived in the Sheriff’s Office’s jurisdiction (51%). For those who lived outside of King County, they commonly worked or attended school (25%) or regularly spent a lot of time (19%) in King County.



Roughly one third of survey respondents spoke a language other than English, with Spanish being the most common. Over 40% of survey respondents did not disclose their race and

ethnicity, and a similar percentage identified as white. Survey respondents were well represented across a wide range of ages, with most between 36-55 years old. Roughly 40% of survey respondents did not disclose their gender; of those who disclosed, 38% were women, 19% were men; followed by non-binary survey respondents who represented just over 1% of responses.³¹

Two of OLEO's community partners—Congolesse Integration Network and Eastside For All—held five listening sessions, four in person and one virtual. These sessions included live interpretation as needed and facilitation of the discussion questions to enable greater access for communities with different accessibility needs. Roughly 100 people total participated in the sessions. Community partners focused on reaching different groups of people during different listening sessions, including immigrant and refugee populations, youth, and immigrant service networks,^c among others. The feedback heard during listening sessions echoed the findings from OLEO's survey, both detailed below, and were used together to inform OLEO's recommendations.

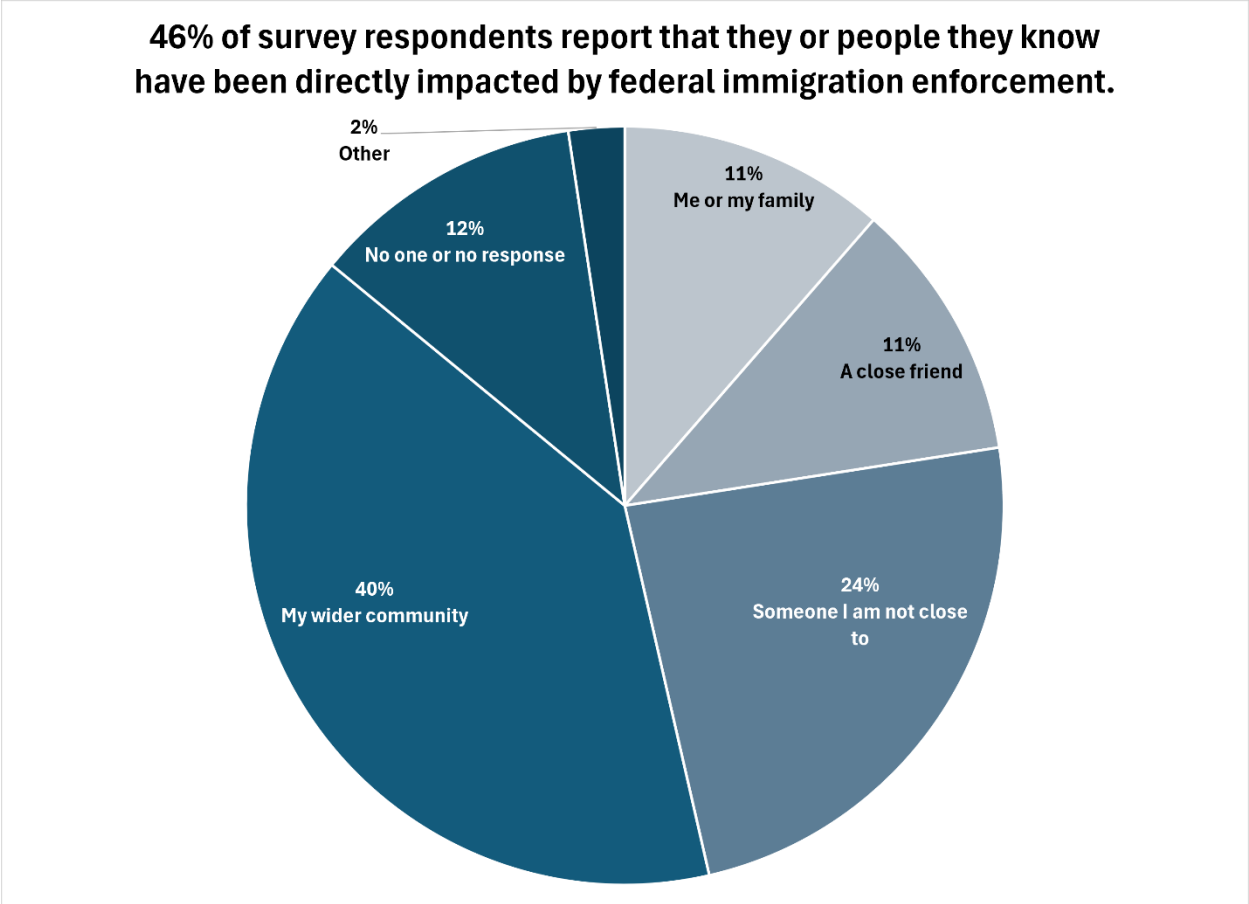
Community Members Describe the Impacts of ICE Activity on Their Communities

Outreach findings suggest that federal immigration enforcement has been felt directly and indirectly by King County residents, with people sharing stories of loved ones' deportations and increasing fears among community members. One in five survey respondents reported that they or someone close to them has been directly impacted by federal immigration enforcement; another quarter reported that someone they know who is not close to them has been directly impacted; and 40% reported that their community at large has been impacted.³²

Six percent of survey respondents provided additional comments about knowing someone in their community who was targeted for immigration enforcement.³³ One survey respondent commented that a friend was detained by ICE during their naturalization appointment and subsequently spent six months at a Washington detention facility, where he experienced medical neglect. Another survey respondent shared:

*"One of my friends was taken into custody from his citizenship interview, after following due process. Held (unlawfully) for 4 months. Another person was taken from their car in my neighborhood."*³⁴

^c In response to increasing immigration enforcement, some community members have joined Rapid Response networks to document enforcement activity, support families experiencing deportation or detention, and connect people to resources. See Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network, "Rapid Response," <https://waisn.org/what-we-do/deportation-defense/rapid-response/>.



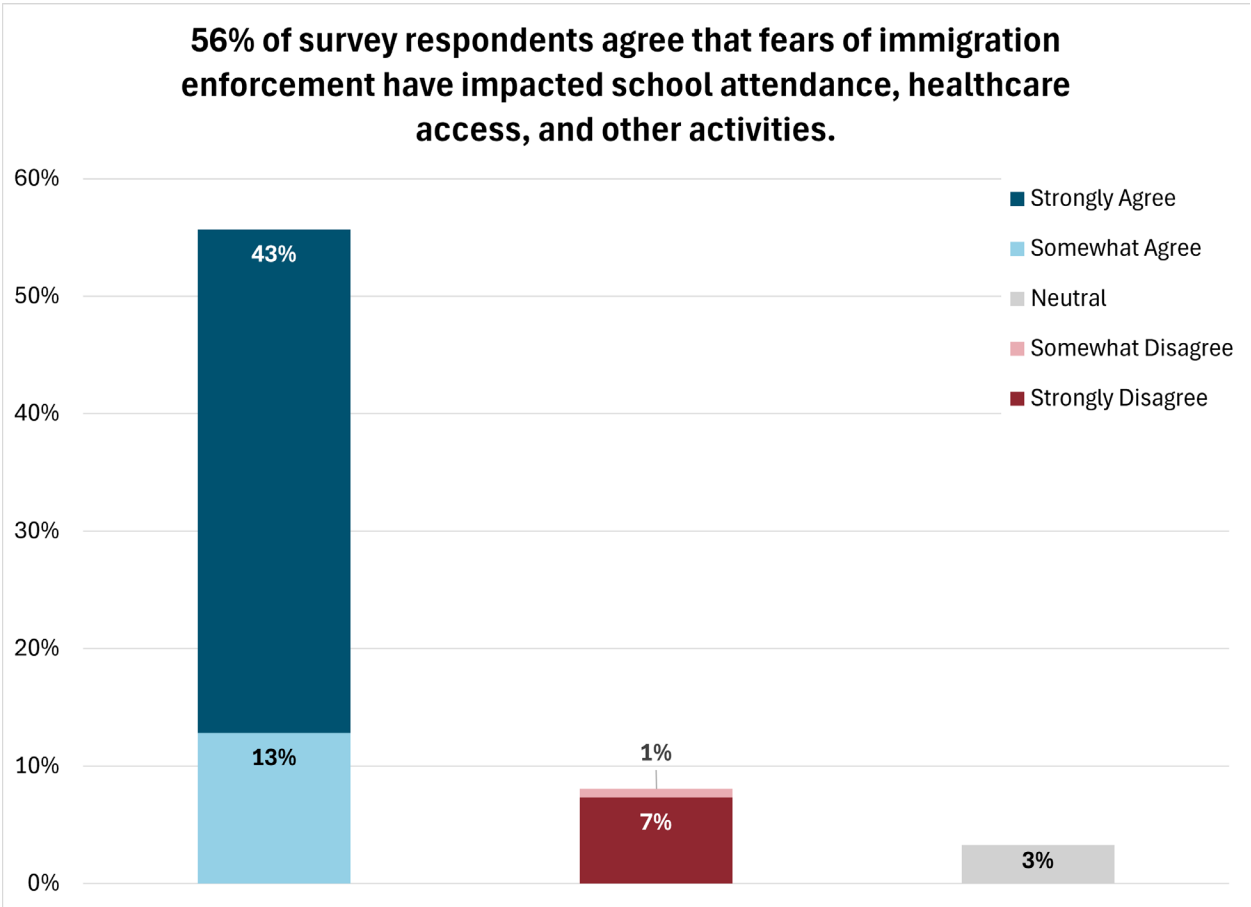
Immigration enforcement has increased in King County,³⁵ and a quarter of survey respondents shared that they had witnessed federal immigration enforcement taking place here.³⁶ Two survey respondents who directly witnessed federal immigration enforcement commented:

“I have witnessed ICE take people and leave their cars in the middle of the road as well as be physically aggressive as they arrest people going about their daily lives.”

“I am an attorney whose clients have been subject to warrantless arrests by ICE accompanied by violence.”³⁷

While not all survey respondents have directly experienced immigration enforcement, many have identified the fear that the increase in enforcement has created. A majority of survey respondents reported that fears of immigration enforcement have impacted school attendance, healthcare access, and other activities for them and their community members.³⁸ Nearly 40% of survey respondents commented that immigration enforcement has created fear in their communities.³⁹ One survey respondent stated:

“Many families with students attending our neighborhood school are afraid to be outside of their house, bring children to school, run errands or engage with anyone (especially anyone in uniform) who might have a connection to the government because they are unsure if they will be detained, regardless of their legal status in the country. Vulnerable community members are terrified of attracting attention from the state and feel unsafe in their daily lives.”⁴⁰



Eleven percent of survey respondents selected that this question had no impact on them or did not apply to their experiences. Twenty-two percent of respondents did not answer this question.

One listening session participant was detained for three months after being arrested at a check-in with ICE.⁴¹ During that detainment, they had to sign documents they did not fully understand and expressed that they now live in fear. Others echoed these fears and said

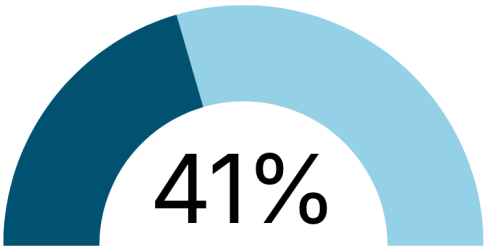
that their families experienced long separations due to detentions, causing financial hardship.⁴² Community gatherings have decreased in frequency due to the fear of immigration enforcement, and participants reported being less comfortable engaging in social events.⁴³

In both the survey and listening sessions, several participants expressed worry about the impacts of aggressive ICE raids on children. A listening session participant shared that her son has expressed increasing anxiety and worry about being deported and not wanting to leave the house because of his fears about ICE.⁴⁴ Survey respondents commented about parents being scared to send their children to school due to increasing immigration enforcement and other negative consequences for youth education.⁴⁵ One survey respondent shared:

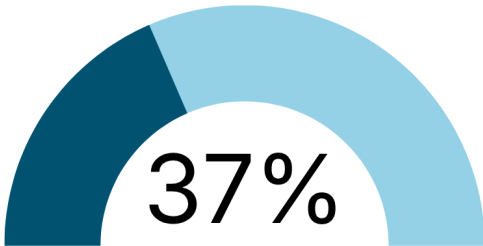
“There is a sense of fear among families I work with and an unwillingness to share information that could lead to reprisal. As someone who works in education, this means that students and families are afraid of accessing certain community resources or asking for help. Students are not filling out WASFA financial aid documentation and limiting their opportunities to pursue higher education.”⁴⁶

Community Members Describe How Increased Federal Immigration Enforcement Has Affected Interactions with Local Law Enforcement

As people’s fear of federal immigration enforcement has increased, their willingness to interact with law enforcement has decreased. More than 40% of survey respondents were less willing or not willing to call law enforcement when they need help, fearing that they may be asked about their immigration status or the statuses of loved ones.⁴⁷ Further, more than one third of survey respondents were less willing or not willing to call the police to report a crime or provide information about crimes due to fear of immigration enforcement efforts.⁴⁸



of survey respondents are less willing to call the police for help because of increased federal immigration enforcement.



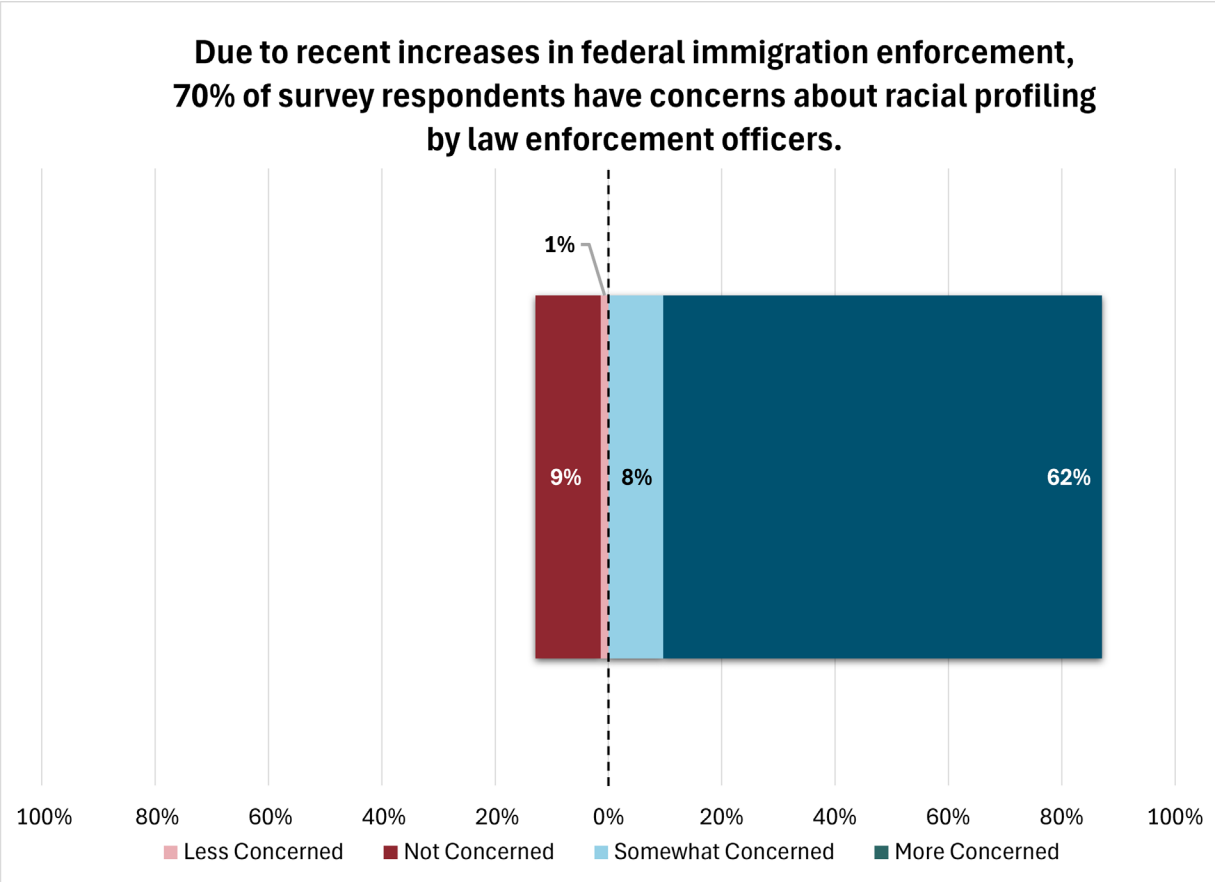
of survey respondents are less willing to call the police to report a crime because of increased federal immigration enforcement.

In addition to survey respondents, some listening session participants also shared that they felt hesitant calling the police for help or to report a crime. Some listening session participants reported that they would only call the police if they absolutely have to and still would not feel entirely safe or sure of their wellbeing and would worry about consequences related to immigration enforcement.⁴⁹ Others mentioned that they no longer felt protected by law enforcement agencies, and some listening session participants felt confused about who would arrive if they called 911.⁵⁰ Some in the community are participating in immigrant service networks to support immigrants and document ICE raids, but they express hesitation at calling 911 because they feel police presence will not be helpful or will make incidents worse.⁵¹

Roughly one third of survey respondents shared that they were not aware of or were confused by Washington's local laws and how they affect local law enforcement's participation in federal immigration enforcement.⁵² This confusion and lack of awareness may contribute to participants' fear of local law enforcement actions and their unwillingness to call police.

Another factor impacting listening session participants' willingness to call police is a fear of racial profiling. There are well-documented racial disparities in policing in the state of Washington.⁵³ Although local jurisdictions have passed policies that work to combat bias in law enforcement, in September 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court published a decision allowing federal immigration enforcement agents in the Los Angeles area to stop people based on their racial or ethnic appearance, speaking Spanish or speaking English with an accent, their occupation, and/or their mere presence at certain locations like "bus stops, car washes, day laborer pickup sites, [and] agricultural sites."⁵⁴ This ruling gave federal immigration enforcement agents permission to profile people throughout the greater Los Angeles region, sparking fear across the United States and increasing concern about racial profiling by all law enforcement officers.

When asked, a vast majority of survey respondents expressed feeling more worried about racial profiling by law enforcement officers because of increased federal immigration enforcement.⁵⁵ Survey respondents with growing concerns about racial profiling cited worries about putting others at risk when interacting with law enforcement officers, a reduced trust in law enforcement, and a fear that law enforcement may cooperate with ICE. Nearly 20% of survey respondents reported feeling like their race or ethnicity has impacted interactions with the Sheriff’s Office.⁵⁶ Listening session participants expressed similar concerns about receiving differential treatment based on their ethnicity and whether or not they speak English.⁵⁷



Community Members Have Questions and Concerns About How the Sheriff's Office Will Intervene in ICE Actions and Create Accountability

When asked about tactics used by federal immigration enforcement agencies, survey respondents had concerns about the legality of tactics and federal accountability mechanisms, and expressed disapproval of ICE tactics.⁵⁸ One survey respondent asked:

"How can we ensure ICE becomes accountable for its actions? How can we prevent ICE officers from wearing masks and not wearing name tags? Are officers actually trained to break car windows?--that appears to be a common tactic. Will the Sheriff's Office will protect King County residents from ICE violence?--if yes, how?"⁵⁹

Fourteen percent of survey respondents had questions or comments about what actions the Sheriff's Office can take to intervene in ICE actions and protect King County residents. Some asked:

"Can local law enforcement enforce court orders to allow the inspection of ICE facilities?"

"I'd like to understand how local law enforcement will engage with immigration enforcement efforts that are inconsistent with local laws and also federal laws. For example, a Federal judge recently ruled that immigration enforcement should not be occurring at civil court. If it occurs, will local laws enforcement intervene on behalf of the rights of our community members? What about local laws protecting other sensitive locations like churches, hospitals, and schools, prohibiting staging on City, Port, or County property, and prohibiting masks?"⁶⁰

Listening session participants also had questions about what further action the Sheriff's Office was taking in response to ICE activity. They wanted to know if local law enforcement was tracking detentions they witness, in addition to writing reports and filming encounters, to ensure that detentions were lawful.⁶¹ Additionally, listening session participants wondered if the Sheriff's Office was connecting witnesses of federal immigration enforcement with resources and organizations that support immigrants.⁶² Some participants shared that policies to record and document ICE actions did not reduce the anxiety in community.⁶³

Ten percent of survey respondents had further questions and comments about what the Sheriff's Office would do to protect protestors at demonstrations related to immigration enforcement.⁶⁴ Some questions from survey respondents were:

"If tear gas is illegal to use, and federal agents deploy it against protesters, do the police have an obligation to arrest the offending agents to prevent further harm coming to our community?"

"At what point does a demonstration become illegal? Is disrupting an event considered a crime that you can be arrested for, even if no one is harmed?"

Most commonly, survey respondents wondered about the Sheriff's Office's commitment to the First Amendment and people's constitutional right to peaceably protest, asking:

"How is KCSO protecting and supporting the public's right of public gathering and protest?"

"Will the Sheriff's Office protect protesters and our right to protest?"

"Are you fully and unequivocally versed in and committed to our First Amendment rights?"

"Can we feel confident that peaceful protest is protected and respected by the King County Sheriff's Department?"

"Will the Sheriff's office protect our rights of free speech and assembly? Will they protect us against masked militarized federal agents?"

"Are protesters being respected and protected to preserve their constitutional rights? Is the sheriff department held accountable for overstepping their authority if that should occur?"⁶⁵

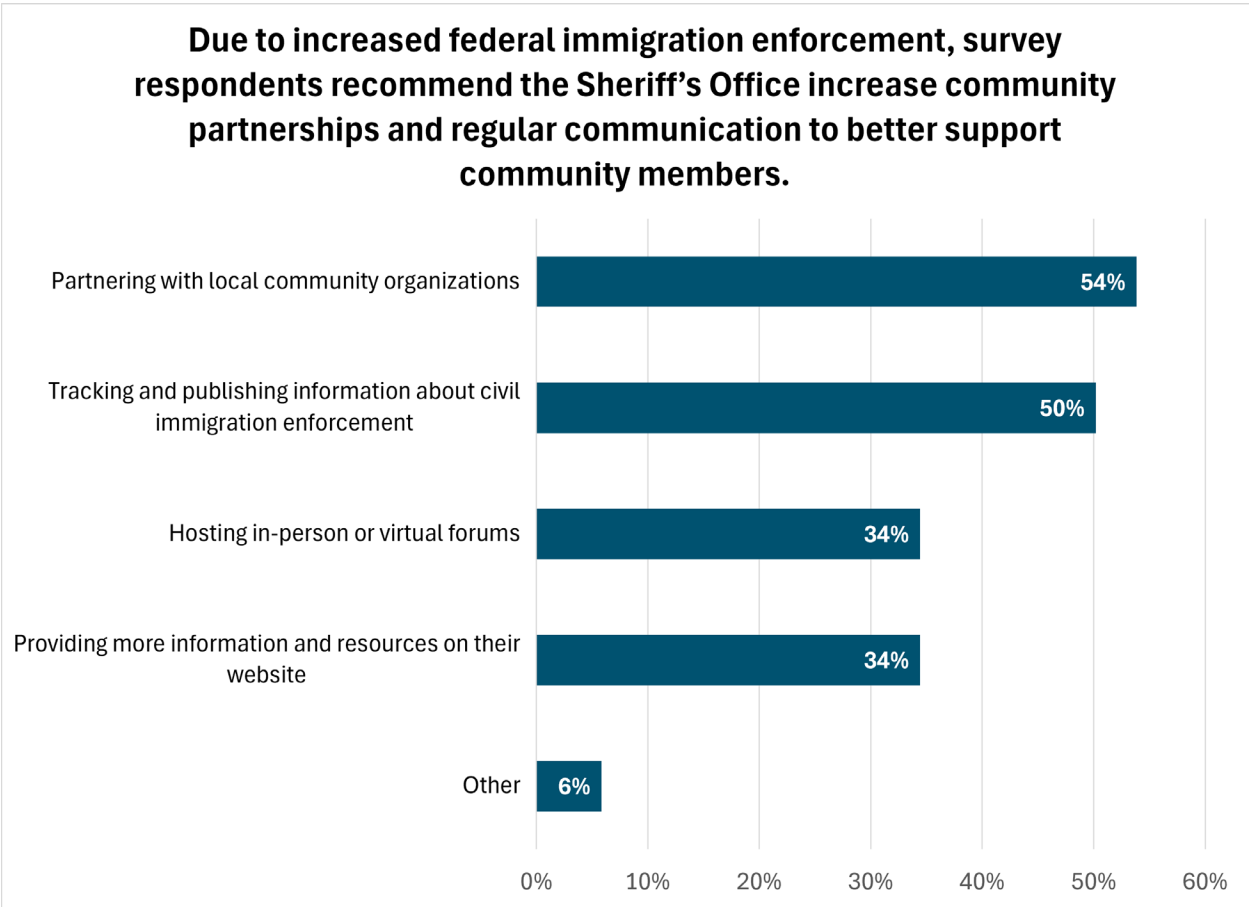
Listening session participants similarly wondered what the role of local law enforcement would be in a situation where ICE was acting aggressively, and what actions would be taken if local law enforcement wouldn't enforce policies like the prohibition on law enforcement wearing masks or not having visible identification. Participants shared that while they are being told to call 911 when ICE is conducting raids, there is a lack of clarity around what local law enforcement will actually do once called. Other questions were directed at accountability structures, including how complaints regarding immigration-related enforcement would be handled and investigated.

Lastly, several listening session participants asked questions about the kinds of surveillance technologies the Sheriff's Office uses and what accountability structures are in place regarding their use and data sharing.⁶⁶ As both ICE and local law enforcement agencies have expanded their uses of surveillance technologies,⁶⁷ there is significant concern about data captured by these tools and how that data is shared across jurisdictions and agencies. In this particular context, people fear that information captured

by the Sheriff’s Office’s surveillance tools is being shared with federal immigration enforcement agencies—helping federal agents to identify individuals to target for the purposes of civil immigration enforcement.

Community Members Recommend the Sheriff’s Office Increase Community Engagement, Information Sharing, and Protections From ICE

OLEO asked both survey respondents and listening session participants for specific feedback on what the Sheriff’s Office could do to meet the needs of community members.



First, participants underscored the importance of community engagement as a means to build trust and effectively communicate with civilians. Survey respondents recommended that the Sheriff’s Office leverage partnerships with community organizations (47%), social media (45%), or in-person and virtual events (33%) to share information about immigration matters.⁶⁸ Similarly, 14% of survey respondents commented that the Sheriff’s Office should spread information about immigration enforcement via community outreach opportunities.⁶⁹ For example, one survey respondent wrote:

“Be vocal, be present in the community about not helping ICE and do more outreach to marginalized groups that local law enforcement will protect them. Our

Black and brown brothers and sisters already have a justifiable distrust of law enforcement which only gives ICE more power. The Sheriff's office should be doing more to change that for our targeted neighbors. They need to prioritize anti-racism training, de-escalation training, and be more present in non-threatening ways within the community.”⁷⁰

Many listening session participants also expressed that they want local law enforcement to do more to build trust in the community. Participants suggested law enforcement build trust by connecting with organizations that help immigrants, create greater transparency, and expand efforts to hold ICE accountable.

Second, people need accessible and timely information about immigration enforcement. Listening session participants emphasized the importance of language accessibility and publishing materials and resources in multiple languages.⁷¹ Survey respondents called on the Sheriff's Office to track and publish information about civil immigration enforcement in their communities.⁷² Similarly, listening session participants expressed interest in a public alert system implemented to inform community members about ICE raids.

Third, participants want increased protection from ICE and support after a family member has been detained. While the Sheriff's Office's current policy establishes noncooperation with federal immigration enforcement, 11% of survey respondents recommended that the Sheriff's Office take further protective action against ICE.⁷³ Survey respondents suggested:

“I would like to see a commitment from the Sheriff's Office that officers will show up when ICE is (for example) demanding entrance to a residence without a warrant.”

“Besides standing aside and not cooperating with ICE agents, they can work to actively protect King County residents from excessive immigration enforcement.”⁷⁴

Finally, in both the survey and listening sessions, participants expressed concerns about abandoned vehicles and property at the scene of immigration detentions.⁷⁵ The participants recommended that the Sheriff's Office take steps to safeguard the property of community members. Survey respondents asked:

“Can [the Sheriff's Office] arrest ICE for trespassing on private property, failing to produce a warrant, entrapment, etc.? It's not enough not to participate. They need to be able to act to protect the community from ICE overstepping their authority, which they are continually doing.”

“What are they doing to hold federal officers accountable for traffic violations and property damage?”⁷⁶

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1.

Create a policy in consultation with legal advisors and community members directing deputies to intervene when they observe federal law enforcement agents engaging in unlawful excessive force.

Under Sheriff's Office policy, state law, and federal law, law enforcement officers have a duty to intervene to stop a fellow officer from violating constitutionally protected rights, such as when using excessive force.⁷⁷ Sheriff's Office [policy](#) and [training](#) provides deputies with guidance on how to intervene when a fellow law enforcement officer in Washington state uses excessive force, including using verbal and potentially physical methods of intervention.^{78,d}

Currently, the Sheriff's Office policy for responding to federal immigration enforcement activities does not explicitly direct deputies to intervene if federal agents use excessive force or otherwise act unlawfully.^e While Washington state law does not establish a duty for a local officer to intervene in excessive force by federal agents, legal scholars agree that the U.S. Constitution imposes a duty for law enforcement to intervene in unlawful conduct by a fellow officer no matter what agency they are from.⁷⁹ Because the exact question of a local officer intervening in the unlawful actions of a federal immigration enforcement agent has yet to be tested in a court of law, some challenges and questions remain to ensure Sheriff's Office deputies are equipped with the proper guidance and resources needed to intervene safely and legally. What is clear is that the potential harms of unlawful excessive force are severe, and King County community members are seeking greater protection from the dangerous and unprecedented tactics currently used by federal immigration enforcement.⁸⁰ The price local law enforcement pay for failing to intervene when any fellow officer is unlawfully causing harm is too steep. In order to maintain the community's trust, the Sheriff's Office must take action to protect King County residents from harm in the face of assault or attack, even if the perpetrator is employed by the federal government.

^d See King County Sheriff's Office, "GOM 3.00.035 Duty to Intervene," August 2024, <https://public.powerdms.com/KCSO/tree/documents/1757974>.

^e RCW 10.93.190 requires peace officers who witness another peace officer using excessive force to intervene when in a position to do so. However, the RCW defines "peace officer" as being "any general authority Washington peace officer" and does not require local officers to intervene in excessive force by federal law enforcement agents. But federal law also creates a duty for officers to intervene if they have a realistic opportunity to prevent another officer from using excessive force. See RCW 10.93.190(5)(b), <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=10.93.190>; See Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement, "An Overview of the Legal Duty to Intervene By Law Enforcement Officers," August 2021, Georgetown Law, <https://dgllearningcenter.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/White-Paper-Officer-Bystander-Liability.pdf>.

Community members here in King County have raised significant questions and concerns around expectations for the Sheriff's Office's intervention in misconduct by federal immigration enforcement agencies. Survey respondents shared:

"What is the Sheriff's office doing when federal immigration authorities violate local laws and even federal laws and constitutional rights? Will King County officers intervene if a member of the community is being threatened with injury or death by federal immigration authorities?..."

"If you see ICE breaking the law like we all do, enforce the law. If you see excessive force, arrest the assaulter. If you see violence by someone with an automatic rifle on an unarmed person, arrest the assaulter. If you see a federal agent shoot and unarmed person in the head or punching a restrained person repeatedly, intervene and enforce the law. Its very simple and straight forward."

"You can intervene in the kidnappings and actually protect the people you swore to protect and serve from the masked, unidentified thugs grabbing them off the streets."⁸¹

There is a strong need for protection of community members that state and local leaders are obligated to meet. Immigration enforcement agents are using federally banned chokeholds that restrict breathing and blood flow.⁸² They have fired shots at at least 22 people since January 2025, resulting in six people, including three U.S. citizens, being killed.⁸³ The violence aimed at community members on American streets is also not being investigated in many cases, leaving a lack of accountability for unlawful actions.⁸⁴

The public relies on local law enforcement for protection in the face of unlawful conduct. As Washington State Attorney General Nick Brown said,

"As a general matter, state and local law enforcement do not have to simply watch or look away if the law is being violated. If they see somebody being assaulted unlawfully, or attacked unlawfully, or otherwise having their legal rights violated, we do not expect state and local officers to simply watch or do nothing...the Washington public expects their local Sheriff...to not simply watch if someone in their community is having their rights violated...as a general matter, that is the expectation, if not the duty, that we would anticipate our local forces having."⁸⁵

Other jurisdictions around the country are setting an example by adopting protective policies that require local law enforcement to intervene when a federal agent uses excessive force.⁸⁶ Given the novel nature of this issue and the lack of historical precedent, very few law enforcement agencies have formally adopted policy language to explicitly

address excessive force by federal agents. The City of Milwaukee passed legislation updating the Milwaukee Police Department's Standard Operating Procedures to require that Milwaukee officers intervene when they observe a federal law enforcement officer using excessive force.⁸⁷ Similarly, the Minneapolis Police Department requires its officers to "verbally or physically intervene to stop excessive force when they have both the reasonably safe opportunity and the means to do so."⁸⁸ Following the shooting deaths of Alex Pretti and Renée Good, community members in Minneapolis scrutinized the police department's response to federal immigration enforcement agents' uses of force and questioned why the police did not do more to protect the community.⁸⁹ Officials in other states, including Connecticut, Colorado, New York, and California have also explored the ways in which local law enforcement can intervene to address unlawful actions by federal agents.⁹⁰

The Sheriff's Office is a certified agency in the Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement program, the national leader in setting standards and providing training for policing agencies to "prepare law enforcement employees to successfully intervene to prevent harm and to create an organizational culture that supports peer intervention."⁹¹ When asked about the duty of local law enforcement to intervene in unlawful actions of a federal agent, Tahir Duckett, Executive Director of the Georgetown Center for Innovations in Community Safety which runs the Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement program said:

"...it is the Constitution (and sometimes state and local law) that creates a duty to intervene to prevent other officers from depriving individuals of their constitutional rights. It's a duty that applies to law enforcement officers even when the officer engaging in a deprivation of rights is from a different agency. And there's no indication that I've seen in the law that this duty to intervene doesn't apply if the officer is a federal officer."⁹²

Every federal circuit has recognized the legal duty that officers have to prevent another officer from using excessive force.^{f,93} Federal courts have further established that the duty to intervene applies across agency lines, finding it irrelevant whether the bystander officer is from a different law enforcement agency than the officer committing the constitutional violation.⁹⁴ Legal advice obtained by OLEO confirmed that under federal law, 42 U.S.C. §1983, local and state officers may be liable for failing to intervene if they observe and have

^f In the federal court system, trial courts are organized into regional "circuits," and every circuit has its own court of appeals. See "About the U.S. Courts of Appeals," United States Courts, <https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/court-role-and-structure/about-us-courts-appeals>.

a realistic opportunity to prevent another officer from violating a person's constitutional rights and do not step in.⁹⁵

One of the challenges of intervention in any misconduct (whether federal agencies are involved or not) is that the legal standard requiring officers to intervene relies on the officer *knowing* that a person's rights are being violated, which can be difficult to assess in the heat of the moment as well as having a realistic opportunity to intervene.⁹⁶ Certainly when layers of differing powers and authorities (local officers present during federal misconduct) come into play these challenges are even harder to contend with. OLEO acknowledges the extremely difficult position deputies are in, especially given the current unprecedented context of a federal agency's flagrant disregard for the Constitution.

Proper intervention occurs across a spectrum of potential tactics. Not all intervention will include physical acts like stepping in to impede an assault or arresting a federal agent. As the Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement program teaches, ideally intervention begins before any force is used through verbal de-escalation to slow down a situation and use of PACT to **P**robe officers who may be trending towards misconduct by verbally raising concerns, **A**lert them that they are engaged in conduct that is potentially unlawful and that they are observing and documenting, **C**hallenge them by warning that if they do not change course fellow officers will intervene, and **T**ake Action when appropriate and necessary to prevent harm.⁹⁷ Sheriff's Office deputies should employ whichever intervention techniques match the circumstances they are presented with, and intervention can look very different based on the scenario.

The following section addresses three of the major challenges for putting the duty to intervene into practice:

1. Federal agents generally have protective immunity for their official duties.

The Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution establishes that federal law takes precedence over state law, and state law cannot regulate federal operations.⁹⁸ When a federal agent's actions are authorized by federal law and are "necessary and proper" for executing the agent's duties, any interference could be deemed unlawful.⁹⁹ However, as the U.S. Supreme Court has established, if a federal agent is acting outside the bounds of their lawful authority—such as using excessive force—protective immunity under the Supremacy Clause does not apply.¹⁰⁰ It is important to recognize that a duty to intervene in excessive force is an extremely narrow context to address the gravest of harms perpetrated against members of our community.

2. Improperly interfering with a federal agent's lawful actions could lead to a criminal charge for obstruction. If local law enforcement "forcibly resist,

oppose, impede, or interfere with a federal agent engaged in the performance of official duties,” they could be charged with obstruction under 18 U.S.C. § 111.¹⁰¹ The Trump administration has explicitly threatened to charge local officials for interfering in ICE operations, but has not done so.¹⁰² Similar to the point above, intervention by a local official could only be considered obstruction if the actions of the federal agent were taken while in the course of their official duties and lawful. Many of the legal cases against community members accused of obstructing ICE operations have been dropped by prosecutors or resulted in acquittals, indicating that courts are rightfully recognizing the unlawful nature of so many of ICE’s current tactics.¹⁰³ Engaging in excessive force is unlawful and is, by definition, outside of the proper execution of official duties and therefore, intervention from a local officer should not only be allowable, but expected.

3. Federal and state law create different standards for allowable uses of force.

Washington state law holds stricter standards for proper use of force than federal law. Under federal law, the standards under which ICE operates, force must be reasonable from the perspective of a reasonable officer,^g whereas, Washington state law requires that a peace officer attempt to de-escalate prior to using force and all uses of force must be reasonable, necessary, and proportional.^{h,104} The challenge local law enforcement must navigate is determining whether the force being used is excessive, which can be extremely difficult to analyze in the heat of the moment. It is incumbent on local officials and the Sheriff’s Office to ensure deputies are equipped with proper guidance, practical training, and support to ensure they are able to intervene when necessary to protect our communities from harm.

Law enforcement leadership across Washington state have been wrestling with the legal complexity surrounding intervention in federal misconduct balanced against maintaining community trust and have been urged by the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs to work with their legal advisors to establish clear guidance for local officers when federal immigration enforcement occurs.¹⁰⁵ OLEO agrees with this sentiment and recommends that stakeholders across the County, including the Sheriff’s Office, government officials, community advocates, and legal experts, come together to ensure the intervention policy balances the needs of the community to be protected from harm

^g See *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989), <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/usrep/usrep490/usrep490386/usrep490386.pdf>.

^h As explained in Footnote a earlier, “Peace Officer” is defined in the RCW to exclude federal law enforcement; see also RCW 10.120.010, <https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=10.120.010>.

alongside the needs of deputies to feel supported in navigating challenging and unprecedented situations.

Currently, the Sheriff's Office policy on responding to potential excessive force by federal immigration enforcement directs deputies to "prioritize de-escalation when safe and without obstructing federal personnel" and requires deputies to document the incident.¹⁰⁶ The Sheriff's Office [Use of Force policy](#) provides guidance on how deputies can employ de-escalation.¹⁰⁷ **De-escalation is vital. And the current policy language should go further to protect King County residents by explicitly adopting a duty to intervene in excessive force by federal agents.** OLEO recommends that the Sheriff's Office policy affirmatively direct its deputies to intervene in excessive force by federal agents when they have a realistic opportunity to take reasonable steps to try and prevent or stop excessive force.

OLEO recommends that the Sheriff's Office address the challenges of intervention by expanding existing training, clearly defining the standards for use of force by federal law enforcement, and providing ample resources and support for deputies in these difficult situations. The Sheriff's Office should work closely with legal advisors and community advocates in shaping the details of this intervention policy and training to navigate the novelty and complexity of the challenges for implementing the policy. In instances of excessive force by federal agents where deputies do not have the opportunity to intervene, deputies should notify a supervisor and document the circumstances that prevented intervention.

RECOMMENDATION 2.

Continue to expand outreach to meet community needs, improve accessibility, and answer questions about immigration enforcement practices.

The Sheriff's Office has worked to share information about their noncooperation with and separation from federal immigration enforcement efforts, using the department's website and social media, and working with local news outlets. However, given community members' significant fear and confusion surrounding immigration enforcement, more work remains.¹⁰⁸ The Sheriff's Office published a detailed [Frequently Asked Questions section](#) to their website and updated their department policies in accordance with the 2026 King County Executive Order.¹⁰⁹ However, fewer than 10% of survey respondents visited the Sheriff's Office website for information on immigration enforcement. Instead, survey respondents shared that they were more likely to rely on social media and local news outlets (print, TV, radio, etc.) for updates.¹¹⁰ As a result, OLEO recommends that the

Sheriff's Office expand their outreach efforts and methods to match the needs of King County residents.

While survey respondents still want information to be published on the Sheriff's Office's website, they recommend that updates also be distributed via social media and partnerships with community organizations.¹¹¹ To meet community members' stated needs and preferences for accessibility to information, OLEO recommends that the Sheriff's Office share information via social media, press releases, media engagement, and partnerships with local organizations. This will maximize communication and understanding between Sheriff's Office personnel and community members. Using social media can promote communication between law enforcement and community members and ensure that information is widely accessible in a timely manner.¹¹² Additionally, neighborhood briefings and townhalls can be a great way to share event or topic-specific information and gain community members' feedback. Partnering with local organizations to plan in-person or virtual events could increase attendance and diversity of perspectives at Sheriff's Office events.

Finally, OLEO recommends that the Sheriff's Office increase partnerships or in-person events with schools and organizations serving youth and parents in King County. Survey respondents expressed significant concern regarding how increased immigration enforcement is affecting youth and school attendance.¹¹³ Focusing outreach efforts on individuals who work with parents and children could address families' fears about school attendance, clarify the difference between local and federal officers, and build a strong groundwork for community-police relations moving forward.

RECOMMENDATION 3.

Complete and publish audits of technology and data software contracts to ensure policy compliance and share contract details with OLEO.

The Sheriff's Office policy commits to complying with state law prohibiting activities in support of civil immigration enforcement and completing internal checks to ensure all employees adhere to state and department requirements. To strengthen this commitment and ensure that audits are comprehensive, OLEO recommends that the Sheriff's Office includes a review of its technology and data software contracts, including any data-sharing agreements within the contracts, in audit procedures.

The Sheriff's Office utilizes various technologies and data software to store evidence and meet investigatory needs. As concern regarding federal immigration enforcement has risen, so has concern regarding law enforcement data software contracts and possible

data sharing between local and federal agencies.¹¹⁴ The Sheriff's Office's policy states that the department will conduct annual audits to ensure compliance with the Keeping Washington Working Act and departmental policies.¹¹⁵ As part of these audits, the Sheriff's Office commits to documenting and evaluating requests for information or assistance from federal immigration enforcement agencies, contacts with consular officials, and any other information deemed relevant.¹¹⁶ According to current department policy language, the Sheriff's Office will share audit findings and recommendations for improvement with the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs and appropriate state entities. Wider sharing of annual audit findings creates additional mechanisms for oversight, accountability, and transparency. Therefore, OLEO recommends that audit findings regarding compliance with state and departmental standards be:

- Published to the Sheriff's Office website and made accessible for all community members;
- Expanded to include review of technology and data software contracts to ensure adequate data protection and alignment with department, county, and state standards; and
- Shared directly with OLEO including details on technology and data software contracts.

RECOMMENDATION 4.

Partner with immigrant service networks to create a protocol for moving abandoned vehicles from roads to avoid the harms associated with towing and impounding when there are verified reports that a federal immigration enforcement agency has detained the driver.

In several incidents around the country, ICE has left abandoned vehicles in roadways, creating serious traffic and public safety concerns and leaving law enforcement with the task of towing the vehicles.¹¹⁷ Community members in Washington have reported that ICE is using abandoned vehicles to draw out the family members of people they detain in order to take them into custody as well.¹¹⁸ Survey respondents and listening session participants also raised concerns about abandoned vehicles.¹¹⁹ For many families, losing a vehicle can result in loss of income, food access, and sometimes shelter.¹²⁰

Most often, deputies do not know why a vehicle has been abandoned and therefore must follow [the department's policy](#) on vehicle impounds. Vehicle impounds are typically left up to deputy discretion but must occur when a vehicle is creating a traffic hazard.¹²¹ When asked, the Sheriff's Office confirmed that even when there is a credible report that a

vehicle has been abandoned due to federal immigration enforcement, they will follow this policy.¹²²

The Sheriff's Office should develop a protocol to support vulnerable community members impacted by the federal detention of a loved one by ensuring they are not also saddled with the burdensome fines or fees from an impounded vehicle and are not exposed to the risk of being detained by federal immigration enforcement agents by trying to remove the vehicle themselves. This new protocol would be limited to those instances where the Sheriff's Office has clear knowledge that a driver has been detained by federal immigration enforcement agents. Unless witnesses call 911 to provide information when they see a driver being detained by ICE, or deputies are on the scene at a detention, deputies will not know why a vehicle has been abandoned and therefore cannot use the new protocol.

Community-based immigrant service networks in South and East King County are currently in conversation with local law enforcement to address the issue of moving abandoned vehicles resulting from ICE detentions without impounding them. OLEO and its community partners encourage the Sheriff's Office to partner with local community organizations and immigrant service providers to develop a protocol as it may require creative solutions to address community members' needs while upholding the legal limits of deputies' authority. The Sheriff's Office should then publicize the new protocol, so the public is aware of its use and its limitations.

RECOMMENDATION 5.

Track and regularly publish readily available information on federal immigration enforcement activity in King County without increasing communication with federal immigration enforcement agencies.

When asked what the Sheriff's Office can do to better support community members, half of survey respondents wanted the Sheriff's Office to track and publish information on federal immigration enforcement activities in King County.¹²³ OLEO recognizes the Sheriff's Office's commitment to noncooperation with federal civil immigration enforcement efforts, which limits information sharing and the Sheriff's Office's ability to track federal immigration enforcement efforts. OLEO does not recommend increasing communication with federal immigration enforcement agencies for the sole purpose of tracking their actions and whereabouts in King County.

However, federal immigration enforcement agencies can request information or assistance in providing emergency services from the Sheriff's Office. Additionally, community members can call to report immigration enforcement activity throughout King

County. In such cases, the Sheriff's Office gains knowledge of where federal immigration enforcement agents are operating across the County. Consistent with Sheriff's Office policy (GOM 5.05.115), these requests are documented and tracked. OLEO recommends that in addition to this internal tracking, knowledge of verified federal immigration enforcement agents in King County be published to maximize transparency and the safety of community members.

RECOMMENDATION 6.

Clarify the responsibilities of supervisors and require additional deputies to be present when responding to federal immigration enforcement activities to ensure full documentation of incidents.

While the Sheriff's Office policy on responding to federal immigration enforcement activities provides a list of supervisor responsibilities (GOM 5.05.135), the policy language could be clearer in explaining what actions supervisors will take in specific scenarios.

For instance, supervisors are notified when:

- Emergency dispatchers receive reports of federal immigration enforcement or suspected impersonation of federal agents (GOM 5.05.120),
- Deputies witness federal agents use unreasonable or excessive force (GOM 5.05.125),
- Deputies determine that federal immigration enforcement agents are conducting federal immigration enforcement without a warrant or court order on County property (GOM 5.05.130), and
- Federal immigration enforcement agents refuse to leave County property after deputies advise them that their activity is prohibited under King County Code and state law and request that they leave the area (GOM 5.05.130).¹²⁴

Despite the range of circumstances when supervisors are notified about immigration enforcement activities, supervisors have one set of responsibilities that seemingly apply in all circumstances listed above (GOM 5.05.135):

“Supervisors shall:

1. Respond to scenes involving federal immigration activity when available.
2. Ensure deputies are following this policy, King County Code, and state law.
3. Assist in verifying federal credentials and clarifying the nature of the operation.

4. Provide guidance when deputies observe force by federal personnel that appears unreasonable, ensuring deputies focus on safety, de-escalation, and documentation without obstructing federal operations.
5. Ensure that the Command Duty Officer (CDO) and chain of command are notified. They will determine whether the matter should be referred to the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office for potential legal action, including, but not limited to, requests for injunctive relief.
6. Review all reports and BWC footage for compliance."

To improve clarity and public understanding, the policy should state the specific action a supervisor will take in response to the various instances of deputy notification referenced throughout the policy chapter. Alternatively, if supervisors are expected to fulfill all responsibilities outlined in GOM 5.05.135 when notified of anything relating to federal immigration enforcement, regardless of circumstance, that should be clarified. Supervisor responsibilities should also be updated to reflect new duties for deputies, such as responsibilities for supervisors related to the duty to intervene when deputies witness federal agents using excessive force.

Additionally, if a supervisor is not able to respond to a scene of federal immigration enforcement activity, they should dispatch additional deputies to support the goal of full recording and documentation of the scene. While the existing policy instructs deputies to record and document federal immigration enforcement activity using body-worn cameras, having more than one deputy present can improve documentation and provide backup if one body-worn camera fails or loses power. If a body-worn camera fails to record, deputies should document the reason.

RECOMMENDATION 7.

Remove the term “criminal immigration enforcement” from Sheriff’s Office policy and replace it with language that better captures the circumstances where the Sheriff’s Office may engage with federal law enforcement agencies.

Sheriff’s Office personnel are prohibited from “engag[ing] in any joint operations, task forces, or other activities that support or constitute civil immigration enforcement.”¹²⁵ However, Sheriff’s Office policy goes on to say, “this policy only allows for criminal immigration enforcement where appropriate.”¹²⁶ The term “*criminal* immigration enforcement” is not defined or explained further.

The Sheriff’s Office explained in written communication with OLEO that this term is a narrow carveout meant to reference instances where the Sheriff’s Office will engage with federal agencies on serious criminal investigations.¹²⁷ In these circumstances, there may

be contact with agencies like ICE and U.S. Customs and Border Protection, but the Sheriff's Office does not conduct any immigration enforcement.¹²⁸ The Sheriff's Office sometimes partners with federal agencies in criminal contexts, for example in human trafficking cases.¹²⁹ These criminal investigations may involve federal agencies that separately conduct immigration enforcement.¹³⁰

To better capture the circumstances that the Sheriff's Office is referencing, OLEO recommends that the term "criminal immigration enforcement" is removed from the GOM and replaced with language that reflects the criminal investigations that the Sheriff's Office conducts and the limited engagement with federal agencies as part of those criminal investigations.

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