

# Illegal Immigrants Stir Local Concerns

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The Butler County Sheriff's Department, backed by Ohio Representative Courtney Combs and Butler County Commissioner Mike Fox, has taken a firm stance on keeping illegal immigrants out of Butler county.

Detective Monte Mayer of the sheriff's department said the motion began Oct. 21 when Butler County Sheriff Richard K. Jones, Fox and Combs spoke at a news conference about raising awareness of the growing problems and financial burdens of undocumented immigrants in Butler County.

On Oct. 26, Jones took matters into his own hands and mailed a bill for \$71,610 to the Federal Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to cover the cost of the estimated 15 illegal immigrants residing in the Butler County Jail.

Jones also posted signs in front of the jail that said, "Illegal aliens here," to help the ICE locate illegal immigrants.

"At one point, the ICE said they did not know where to find illegal aliens," Mayer said. "So about two and a half weeks ago, the sheriff posted signs to help them out."

Mayer stressed that intentions are to provoke the attention of the federal government so taxpayers will no longer be stuck with the burden of paying for undocumented people.

He said feedback they've been receiving has been positive for the most part, and that Sheriff Jones has also created a blog to give people a forum where they can post their thoughts immediately.

Jeff Gamso, legal director for ACLU of Ohio, said the county's targeting of illegal immigrants is dangerous in that it is counterproductive and sends a message of exclusion.

"All it says, implicitly or explicitly is that we're racist and we're proud," Gamso said. "I would never suggest that the sheriff or those who work for the sheriff feel that way, but that is the kind of message this sends."

Mayer said the actions have nothing to do with race.

"Just because we have targeted illegal aliens, it does not mean they are picking on any particular place of origin or race," he said.

Gamso said if the sheriff is actually serious about the ICE coming to intervene, he should write up a case rather than rely on political showmanship.

“Much of what he’s doing is just political posturing,” Gamsso said. “There are better things for the sheriff to be doing with his time and his money.”

Gamsso said, while it sounds good on paper, the laws of immigration are very complex and enforcement will be difficult because it will require a large amount of training.

“It’s creating an atmosphere that is bad for business, mean spirited and offensive,” Gamsso said. “It’s terrible policy up, down, sideways, from whatever point of view you look at it.”

Combs said one of the biggest reasons the federal government needs to crack down on illegal immigrants is that Butler County is one of the fastest growing counties in Ohio and also has a large influx of illegal immigrants.

Combs believes one of the biggest misconceptions people have is that illegal immigrants are good for the economy because they take all the jobs U.S. citizens don’t want. He said people also need to take into consideration the financial burden undocumented immigrants have on taxpayers.

“We have no problem with and even encourage people to come to the U.S. and Ohio as long as they do so legally,” he said.

Combs is currently working on a bill that would empower local law enforcement to hold illegal immigrants in jail until the federal government can pick them up.

The bill will also include a penalty for the employers of undocumented people. He hopes to have the bill ready by the beginning of next year.

“We wouldn’t even be talking about this if the federal government was doing their job,” Combs said.