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Understanding immigration enforcement and the role of the Estes Park Police

By Police Chief Wes Kufeld

Recent events across the nation and the election of our new president have prompted communities to take a close look at their positions on immigration enforcement. I think we could all agree that immigration is a complex and challenging subject, and it has serious implications for all immigrants regardless of nationality or ethnicity. In Estes Park, our police department depends on good relationships with all community members including immigrants, documented or undocumented. Our police department always has, and always will, protect the rights of everyone who lives in or visits Estes Park – and we value diversity.

An increasingly common misconception is that we, as local police, enforce immigration laws. It's important to understand that our officers are not out there to enforce immigration law and deportation efforts. This is the responsibility of the federal government. Local law enforcement agencies are, however, requested to cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). When requested of the Estes Park Police Department, we are ready to assist ICE in the arrest and detainment of any undocumented immigrant who is suspected of a felony crime.

As far as day-to-day policing, people are not required to provide proof of immigration status, and our officers are not required by ICE to check immigration status, nor to conduct sweeps for undocumented individuals. So, we don't do these things. However, it is our responsibility to collect immigration documentation when we arrest an individual suspected of a felony crime – and this is required of us by ICE. As explained in a recent article by Sheriff Smith, when a felony suspect is booked by the Larimer County Jail, Larimer County provides the immigration documentation to ICE. These steps are necessary to keep our communities safe, and we intend to continue doing our part to assist.

It's fortunate that we are not involved in routine deportation efforts, because they would conflict with the Estes Park Police Department's mission and our community policing practices. It would ultimately drive a wedge between local police and the people who reside within our community by hindering their willingness to provide critical information that could help keep our community safe. Our commitment to the community is steadfast, with a focus on removing any dangerous criminals who pose a threat to public safety. And, we will continue to treat all community members with respect as valued, active partner in our efforts.