



 Birelles Line

151.1846P

17

02

## IMMIGRATION

# Let police do their own jobs

BY CECILIA MUÑOZ and MICHELE WASLIN  
[www.nclr.org](http://www.nclr.org)

Congress needs to let police officers do their jobs, which is to fight crime and protect the public. But a new House bill would change this arrangement — for the worse.

The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 would require state and local police to enforce complex civil-immigration laws without receiving any training.

Federal immigration agents are trained rigorously. They must pass an intensive months-long course on immigration law before going into the field. It is unlikely that an untrained police

officer would be able to recognize an immigration document or determine whether the individual is in violation of any particular law.



MUNOZ

This new setup likely would lead to errors, racial profiling, discrimination and costly litigation.

Let's be clear. Police already have the ability to arrest and detain immigrants involved in criminal activities, and local police departments coordinate with the federal immigration authorities every day. But police are not trained to ascertain immigration status.

Because U.S. citizens are not required to carry citizenship documents, citizens who "look or sound like foreigners" may be unfairly questioned, harassed or detained.

Although dozens of types of documents could prove a non-U.S. citizen's legal status, processing times and backlogs at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services may incorrectly give the appearance that visas have expired. Many lawful immigrants could also be in the process of extending a temporary visa or adjusting their status.

### Fear of deportation

But how would police officers know all this? Are these vagaries of immigration law what we want them to worry about instead of ensuring public safety?

Many police associations around the country oppose these provisions. They know that maintaining trustful relationships with immigrant communities is important to keeping our neighborhoods safe.

But when police are given the added task of enforcing immigration laws, trust between law enforcement and the community may erode, and Latinos and other ethnic minorities may become fearful of reporting crimes or coming forward as witnesses. Even victims of domestic violence may stop reporting abusive spouses for fear of being deported.

Police officers should not become enforcers of federal immigration laws. That job should be left to federal immigration agents.

Cecilia Muñoz is vice president for policy and Michele Waslin is director of immigration-policy research at the Washington-based National Council of La Raza.