

**Subject:** Top Suffolk cops distance themselves from federal immigration enforcement



LONG ISLAND**POLITICS**

# Top Suffolk cops distance themselves from federal immigration enforcement

But immigration rights advocates called for rules prohibiting the county's cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations.



Suffolk jails only hold individuals facing local charges or sentences and are not serving as a detention center for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Sheriff Errol Toulon Jr. told a legislative committee Thursday. Photo Credit: James Carbone

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Top Suffolk police and jail officials distanced themselves from federal immigration enforcement Thursday, as lawmakers peppered them with questions about how county law enforcement agencies treat those living in the United States illegally.

In response to advocates' concerns that immigrants stopped for minor violations were being put at risk of deportation, Police Chief of Department Stuart Cameron told the Suffolk County Legislature's Public Safety Committee that it was police policy not to

inquire about immigration status, although the department does cooperate with law enforcement agencies including Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

“People should not automatically mirror their displeasure against the federal government and their policies against the Suffolk County police,” Cameron, speaking at a meeting in Hauppauge, said. “ICE has a very specific and very different role than the Suffolk County police, and clearly if we’re inquiring about people’s immigration status, it’s adverse to public safety, because they’re going to be afraid to report crimes to us.”

Immigration activists and family members of detainees told lawmakers last month that immigrants stopped for traffic infractions have ended up in deportation proceedings and that individuals believed to be plainclothes Suffolk police officers have been observed at ICE raids. After that meeting, Public Safety Committee Chairwoman Monica Martinez (D-Brentwood) called for Suffolk police officials to answer questions about its traffic stop policies and procedures.

Sherrif Errol Toulon, who updated the committee on his first six months in office, and other jail officials also discussed their department’s practices regarding immigrants in this country illegally.

Local jails only hold individuals facing local charges or sentences, and are not serving as a detention center for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, although two ICE officers have work space at Suffolk County jails, Toulon told the committee.

Jail officials said 137 inmates — about 10 percent of the jail population — had detainers from Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The county also holds about five inmates per week for federal law enforcement agencies, including the U.S. Marshals Service, the Bureau of Prisons or ICE, Toulon said.

Tempers flared during the meeting when Legis. Robert Trotta (R-Fort Salonga) raised the issue of violence committed by the MS-13 gang.

“To sit here and to sort of criticize this county which just went through a bloodbath of MS-13 murders is obscene. I apologize for you having to go through this,” Trotta told sheriff’s officials.

Martinez said committee members had to ask questions.

Trotta responded to Martinez, who represents areas hardest-hit by the gang violence, saying, “You of all people — “

“Don’t even go there Trotta! How dare you,” Martinez said. “These are questions that need to be asked and answered.”

Martinez said after the meeting she was reassured by the presentation.

“I know the police department is trying to do its best to keep the community safe,” she said.

Legis. Bridget Fleming (D-Noyac) said the questions were necessary given stepped-up immigration enforcement under President Donald Trump, including the separation of children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border. Trump reversed that practice last month.

“It’s an important moment in time to understand what’s happening locally,” she said.

But local immigration rights advocates said Thursday that they remained concerned about whether county policies are always followed and called for rules prohibiting Suffolk’s cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations to be codified into county law. They also said that county officials should only honor warrants to detain individuals that are signed by a judge.

“We still continue to hear from the community about things that don’t add up,” such as officers asking about immigration status at traffic stops, Anita Halasz, executive director of the Hauppauge-based advocacy organization Long Island Jobs for Justice, said after the meeting.

“I think both the sheriff’s department and Suffolk County Police Department are making a good-faith effort to answer all the questions the community has been raising for the last year and a half,” Halasz said. “I do find that the questions we’ve been elevating should not be difficult to answer.”

The **Rev. Kate Jones Calone**, a Presbyterian minister and director of the **Setauket-based nonprofit Open Door Exchange**, said: “Effective law enforcement relies on a strong relationship with the community served. The fear that any interaction with law enforcement might lead to immigration consequences is inhibiting some community members from trusting our local police.”

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