

**TESTIMONY**

of

**SHERIFF TODD ENTREKIN**

**Etowah County Sheriff's Office  
Etowah County, Alabama  
827 Forrest Avenue, Gadsden, Alabama 35901  
E-mail: [tentrekin@etowahcounty.org](mailto:tentrekin@etowahcounty.org)  
Telephone: 256-490-0577**

**May 3, 2011**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER AND MARITIME SECURITY**

**"Border Security and Enforcement -  
Department of Homeland Security's Cooperation with State and Local Law  
Enforcement Stakeholders."**

Good morning Chairwoman Miller and Members of the Committee. I am Todd Entrekin and I currently serve as Sheriff of Etowah County, Alabama. I am very glad to appear before you today to discuss the ever-present issues of immigration in the United States. I am honored to represent the citizens of Etowah County, the State of Alabama, Sheriff's and local law enforcement from across the United States before you today.

In 1998, my agency partnered with then, the Immigrations and Naturalization Service (INS), to house some illegal detainees in their custody. In 2003, INS further affirmed their commitment to partner with Etowah County as they funded an \$8 million expansion to the Etowah County Detention Center, so that we could better serve the needs of the INS. During the months after the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, our facility was utilized to temporarily house subjects who were later described as co-conspirators in the terrorist attacks.

Through the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the formation of the Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) Agency, the Etowah County Sheriff's Office has continued in partnership to assist ICE's primary mission, in promoting homeland security and public safety through the criminal and civil enforcement of laws of the United States. To this end, the Etowah County Sheriff's Office has directly served both the Atlanta Field Office and the New Orleans Field Office of ICE.

In addition to housing detainees, my Office has and continues to participate in both the transportation of detainees as well as enforcement of immigration laws through the delegation of authority program. Transportation of detainees has included moving detainees throughout primarily the Southeastern United States from state prison custody or Bureau of Prison (BOP) custody and transporting them to ICE custody.

Through the delegation of authority, commonly known as the 287G program, we have been able to assist ICE with enforcement of immigration laws within our jurisdiction. When individuals are arrested on local or state charges, 287G certified deputies review their citizenship or immigration status. Those who appear to be in violation of immigration laws, are then referred directly to ICE personnel for further review and processing.

As a result of each of these partnerships over the last decade and a half, I have seen first hand the importance and the benefit of the DHS and local-state relationships. Through my experience with DHS in detention, immigration enforcement, 287G, and more recently, Secure Communities, I know that much value is added for both the local government and the Federal Government.

These types of inter-governmental service agreements (IGSA) promote efficiency, cost effectiveness, and simply place more boots on the ground where it matters most. This arrangement allows DHS to accomplish more of their mission with less financial demand compared to staffing all the needed resources at the federal level. Very importantly today, this then allows the local government to enjoy the ability to stimulate their economy through the creation of additional employment and financial investment into local resources and the community.

Due to the authority and resources of DHS, they are the experts on immigration and related issues. Though the Federal Government's resources are vast, unfortunately, we all know there are limitations. With these limitations, come frustrations that are seen clearly in the States through various immigration legislation proposals. These laws have raised many questions concerning the States' role of immigration and the Constitutionality of those actions. Immigration has become a hot topic in Alabama over the last several months. Recent Alabama House of Representatives Bill 56 (HB56) and a similar Senate Bill, appear to be based on the law passed in Arizona. This legislation basically would make it a crime of trespassing if someone is not a U.S. Citizen and is in the State illegally. Under the current wording of the bill, law enforcement officers will be required to enforce the law or face penalties.

If this type of legislation is enacted, I feel sure we'll have to put out a 'no vacancy' sign at our detention center as well as others throughout the State. This type of activity would not only burden local law enforcement in a negative fashion, it would burden other social services as well. For instance, if a mother and father are arrested and they have several small children at home, it will put more stress on the Department of Human Resources. Other similar effects that may be less obvious to states will be experienced as well. With the implementation at the state level demanding the federal government to react, further complications will arise. As an example, the manpower

limitations and transportation restrictions on ICE staff will prove difficult as a result of the process requiring some time until the arrestee is determined to be in the country illegally and then can be transferred to the custody of ICE.

Based on my experience, the most effective strategy to calm some of the immigration frustrations for the local, state, and federal governments would be to maximize the resources and expertise already available. Further, greater dividends would be noticeable through the enhancement and development of further partnerships between DHS and local law enforcement agencies. From a local perspective, our law enforcement officers serve as the first line of defense. These IGSA arrangements equip more boots on the ground, serving as a force multiplier for DHS.

To capitalize on this potential, it would be beneficial for ICE to offer some financial reimbursement or incentive to the local agency that is required to supply staff, overtime, and resources to implement programs like 287G. Budget allocation and staffing at the local level become very sensitive in prioritizing staffing needs, therefore, for many, this single issue prevents many local agencies from using 287G to the fullest.

To continue to maximize these opportunities to the fullest, together, we must continually strive to enhance our operations through innovative methods and funding initiatives. The new safety net to the 287G programs, Secure Communities, is only as effective as the information it is provided. As I understand it, if a subject's fingerprints are not in one of several queried databases, it is ineffective. Often, this is due to a backlog of paper prints that need to be uploaded so that all possible data can be accessed.

Just last week, the Secure Communities Initiative became active in my County. Due to my agency's existing partnership with ICE, we have Live Scan equipment in place and were easily able to go live. However, I understand that we are the minority in Alabama and other surrounding states, having the equipment in place and readily operational. Many local sheriff's offices are small and underfunded. This lack of funding keeps many of them from the ability to purchase the needed equipment to support Secure Communities.

Methods of grant funding should be considered which would expedite information being entered into the system to make it the best it can be. During a time when local and state budgets are being cut sharply, federal funding is essential to cultivate and produce

strong immigration results from local and state law enforcement. Through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) administration of Operation Stone Garden, border states are supported in their local efforts to serve as a tool to equip additional manpower at the local level to assist in immigration enforcement. While this is an excellent strategy for border states, similar initiatives should be funded and implemented for other states that face immigration issues that equally can impact all aspects of life for our citizens.

Simply, without healthy relationships between Federal, state, and local governments, DHS could not accomplish its mission as effectively as it does through IGSA's. Further, local governments would not have the opportunity to be better trained and equipped by being involved in the bigger picture of securing our homeland. We are pleased to work alongside the men and women of DHS to accomplish what none can alone.

Ms. Chairwoman, and Committee Members, again, thank you for the opportunity to sit before you today. I appreciate your time and service to our Nation. At this time, I would be glad to continue to maximize these opportunities to the fullest. Together, we must continually strive to enhance our operations through innovative methods and funding initiatives. I will now be pleased to discuss any questions you may have.