



After ACLU Advocacy, Roaring Fork School District Takes a Step toward Limiting Collaboration between School Resource Officers and ICE

March 20, 2012 -- Under pressure from the ACLU of Colorado and local community activist groups, the Roaring Fork School Board unanimously voted to enter into an agreement urging the police departments of the Roaring Fork Valley to exercise "extraordinary discretion" before assigning a school resource officer (SRO) to additional police work that may implicate the immigration status of a student's family. The agreement recognizes that assigning SROs to law enforcement work in which "a student's family immigration status may come into question . . . may diminish the necessary trust the SROs have worked so long to build with the student and family."

The agreement followed a letter from the ACLU urging the school board to prohibit collaboration between SROs and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), as well as a significant and prolonged grassroots campaign in the Roaring Fork Valley led by the Association of Youth United in Action (AJUA) and the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC). According to ACLU of Colorado Staff Attorney Rebecca T. Wallace, AJUA members, many of whom are undocumented students, courageously took on the Roaring Fork School Board and Roaring Fork Valley police departments to fight for their right to attend public school without fear, often taking the chance of revealing their undocumented status in the process.

SROs are local police officers, but Roaring Fork School District SROs are partially funded by the school district. SROs partner with school districts to promote school safety and build stronger relations between law enforcement, students and the local community. Over the past year, it had come to light that one or more SROs working within the school district had been assigned to an ICE task force and had been participating in home raids with ICE that led to deportation proceedings against students' family members and/or friends. In an October 17, 2011, letter to the Roaring Fork School Board, the ACLU explained that this collaboration threatened the sense of safety and security that students – whether documented or undocumented – have a right to feel. According to the ACLU's letter, such collaboration violates federal law prohibiting schools from erecting barriers that discourage undocumented children from attending public school.

"All children documented or otherwise, have a right to attend public school in this country," said Ms. Wallace. "When school resource officers work hand in hand with immigration authorities, students from immigrant families are at risk of being placed in the untenable position of having to choose between attending school or protecting themselves and their families from deportation. Children should never have to make that choice."

While this agreement is a step in the right direction, the ACLU of Colorado says that it does not go nearly far enough. "To be clear, the school board should outright ban any collaboration between SROs and immigration authorities, and its failure to do so is almost certain to increase students' distrust of SROs because of their past collaboration with ICE," added Ms. Wallace. "The Roaring Fork Valley police

departments likewise should remove all SROs from any ICE task force in order to work towards re-establishing trust with immigrant students, and to follow through with the expressed intent of this agreement.”

According to the ACLU of Colorado, Carbondale’s response to a document request revealed that three Roaring Fork SROs were cross-designated for the purpose of collaborating with ICE. One has left the state, and the other two are current SROs in Glenwood Springs. “We hope and expect that this agreement will be sufficient to deter the Roaring Fork Valley police departments from continuing to assign their SROs to any immigration-related work and to remove these officers from ICE task forces,” says Ms. Wallace. “We will certainly continue to monitor the situation to see that our expectations are met.”

Additionally, the United States Department of Homeland Security Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties has recently opened an investigation into potential civil rights abuses arising from Roaring Fork SROs’ collaboration with ICE.

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The ACLU of Colorado works to protect, defend and expand the civil rights and civil liberties of all persons in Colorado. For more information, contact Rosemary Harris Lytle, Communications Director, at rharrislytle@aclu-co.org or 720.402.3111.