

Mike Lee

Sheriff of Scott County, Mississippi

November 7, 2019

Immigration Raids: Impacts and Aftermath on Mississippi Communities

Mr. Chairman and Members of this committee, it is an honor and a privilege to be invited to appear before you to discuss the recent immigration enforcement actions in Scott County. I am Mike Lee, the Sheriff of Scott County and been Sheriff since 2007. I have lived in Scott County all of my life. As the highest ranked law enforcement officer in the County, I am responsible for policing the entirety of Scott County.

For perspective, Scott County is East of our Capitol City Jackson. The County has approximately 28,000 residents. The most recent census data provided by the US Census Bureau states that approximately 11.5% of our citizens identify as Latino.

We have had Latino workers in Scott County since the 1990s. Koch Food employs over 3000 people some of which are immigrants. Latinos constitute a large work force in Scott County and are important to our economy. Those workers have become a part of the community in Scott County. Their children attend local schools and participate in local sports. The feedback I have received from Scott County citizens is that folks admire our Latino communities work ethic and commitment to family.

In my role as Sheriff, I do not believe Latino workers present a danger to our community. I base that on the fact that I have not seen any spike in crime as a result of Latino individuals living and working in Scott County.

Currently, my Jail is holding approximately one hundred twenty-five (125) inmates. Only three (3) of those one hundred twenty-five (125) inmates identify as Latino and one (1) of those (3) three is a Scott County resident. This, in my opinion, is the best evidence of the lack of impact Latino workers have had on the Scott County's criminal justice system. Simply put, the Scott County Sheriff's Department has not had problems with the Latino community.

I previously mentioned Koch Foods. Koch is one of Scott County's largest employers. On August 7, 2019, Koch Foods was one of the plants in the State of Mississippi that Federal immigration officials "raided". Nearly two hundred and fifty (250) employees were arrested at Koch Food by immigration officers.

First, let me say that as Sheriff of Scott County, I swore an oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Mississippi. I stand behind our federal officers who enforce our immigration laws. However, I feel that the action could have been handled better had my agency been prepared in advance.

My office had no notice of the "raid" and, therefore, was taken by surprise. After the raids, my office, the school system and local citizens had to step in to care for many of the children whose parents were arrested. Children of those arrested had nowhere to go for hours once school let out. The first parents to return to Scott County did not arrive until 11:00PM. Thanks to our schools, local citizens and my office, we were able to care for those children during the interim. However, forewarning of the action would have allowed my office to better prepare to handle the problems left in the wake of the raid.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning.