

Undocumented Sonoma, Napa county immigrants get new hotline to fight ICE operations

The hotline will dispatch 'legal observers' to the scene of local ICE enforcement operations. | 



In this Tuesday, Feb. 7, 2017, photo released by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement shows foreign nationals being arrested during a targeted enforcement operation conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) aimed at immigration fugitives, re-entrants and at-large criminal aliens in Los Angeles. (Charles Reed/U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement via AP)

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

November 8, 2017

North Bay immigration advocates are launching a 24-hour emergency hotline for undocumented immigrants caught up in local enforcement and apprehension operations.

The hotline, dubbed the Rapid Response Network, is designed to provide immediate legal protection and support to Sonoma and Napa county immigrants being sought by agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE. In some cases, evidence gathered during an enforcement operation can be used in court to dismiss a deportation case, according to one advocate.

“If we can show that they entered a home, say without consent or without a warrant, that would violate the Fourth Amendment,” said Richard Coshnear, a Santa Rosa immigration attorney who heads Vital Immigrant Defense Advocacy and Services, or VIDAS. “Then we can persuade a judge to suppress the government's evidence and terminate the case.”

Coshnear said in many cases involving ICE enforcement, there are no witnesses to document possible constitutional violations.

“The Rapid Response Network can give us those witnesses,” he said.

The hotline was announced publicly during a press conference Wednesday evening at the site of the planned Roseland Village Neighborhood Center in south west Santa Rosa. The hotline is a collaboration among some 50 local nonprofits and community services organizations, said Vikki DuRee, a retired elementary school teacher who lives in Healdsburg and will serve as a dispatcher for the hotline.

Groups collaborating with the hotline include the North Bay Organizing Project, VIDAS, the Graton Day Labor Center, Corazon Healdsburg, Catholic Charities and the Napa Rapid Response Network. The effort has more than 400 trained legal observers and two dozen dispatchers.

DuRee, who is also training legal observers, said the two-county hotline will be staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. She said a hotline works with online software that allows the on-duty

dispatcher to receive emergency calls on his or her cell phone.

The dispatcher, who is logged into the online software, enters the location where the enforcement operation is taking place and immediately gets a map that shows where the nearest legal observers are located, DuRee said. Legal observers near incident then receive a text message alerting them of the ICE operation.

For more information about upcoming training sessions for legal observers, go to facebook.com/NorthBayRapidResponse. The hotline number is 707-800-4544.

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