



Robert P. Astorino, Westchester County Executive

NEWS RELEASE

Ned McCormack, Communications Director (914) 995-2932

Contact: Jerry McKinstry (914) 995-2925

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 20, 2017

ASTORINO ISSUES EXECUTIVE ORDER ON IMMIGRATION *Compromise prevents turning Westchester into a “Sanctuary County”*

Westchester County Executive Robert P. Astorino today issued an Executive Order that states county law enforcement will “continue to cooperate with federal authorities in investigating and apprehending aliens involved in criminal activity,” but will be prohibited, as has been the policy since 2006, from inquiring about “a person’s immigration status unless such officer is required by law to do so or is investigating illegal activity other than mere status as an undocumented alien.”

Astorino said the Executive Order is a balanced compromise designed to foster trust within the immigrant community, while not providing sanctuary to criminals. Astorino added that the Executive Order reinforces existing County Police procedure, and replaces a 2006 Executive Order by then-County Executive Andrew Spano that was determined by the County Attorney to be in violation of federal law.

“For years, Washington has failed us,” Astorino said. “We have a broken immigration system and borders that are not secure. This is a failure of Congress, both parties and multiple Presidential administrations. While we wait for Washington to finally get its act together, Westchester will continue to protect all of its residents. However, if you end up in our jail for committing a crime, and you’re not here legally, we’re not providing a sanctuary to you and we will cooperate fully with federal immigration officials.”

In August, Astorino vetoed an Act passed by the Board of Legislators because of strong objections by many in law enforcement, the County Attorney and others who said that the bill

would turn Westchester into a “Sanctuary County,” as defined by the U.S. Department of Justice. In his veto message, Astorino said the Act “violates federal law, infringes upon long-established principles of law enforcement cooperation, and jeopardizes millions in federal public safety grants.”

Westchester County Department of Public Safety Commissioner George Longworth added that “anything that inhibits our ability to work with federal law enforcement partners like the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security and other agencies is a bad and reckless idea.”

Hector Lopez, president of the Westchester Hispanic Law Enforcement Association, said the Act would have placed “handcuffs on our law enforcement officers, not the criminals” and would have opened the doors for undocumented immigrants involved in criminal activity, such as the ruthless MS-13 gang, to migrate to Westchester and prey on other immigrants.

The Legal Aid Society of Westchester was concerned that restricting Homeland Security from the county jail would have caused them to “move to other areas to find non-citizens such as courts, houses of worship, schools, etc.”

Astorino said he believes his Executive Order should calm the stated fears of undocumented immigrants that they cannot report crimes or seek medical assistance for fear that they will be deported.

“Everyone in Westchester, no matter what their immigration status is, should feel safe to report crimes and seek medical attention,” said Astorino. “However, Westchester cannot and must not become a ‘Sanctuary County’ that provides a safe haven to criminals. My Executive Order protects the former, and my veto of the Act prevents the latter.”

The new Executive Order has support of members of the Board of Legislators throughout Westchester.

“This Executive Order strikes the right balance between the concerns of law enforcement and the concerns of the immigrant community and I’m happy to support it,” said Board of Legislators Minority Leader John Testa, R-Peekskill.

“I support immigrants and they should always feel welcome in our community,” said Legislator Francis Corcoran, R-Bedford. “This Executive Order moves us to the proper place to protect all of our residents and gets to the heart of the concerns raised by some of my constituents.”

“The Executive Order is a common sense measure designed to support law enforcement, protect public safety and give peace of mind to the immigrant community should they need to seek medical or police assistance, or are simply walking down the street,” said Legislator Margaret Cunzio, C-Mount Pleasant.

“I worked diligently with the stakeholders in my district and County Executive Astorino to codify these protections for all residents in this Executive Order,” said Legislator David Tubiolo, R-Yonkers. “Westchester County will continue to welcome everyone regardless of where they came from or who their parents were. That's what the American dream is all about.”

###