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By the Numbers: The Impact of Immigration Enforcement Activities on City and County Costs

New report documents how voluntary cooperation by local governments with immigration enforcement carries both known and unknown fiscal costs.

RICHMOND, VA – ICE sent 3,100 detainment requests to local and regional jails in Virginia in fiscal year 2017. If each detainer request had resulted in holding the individual for an extra 48 hours, complying with detainers would have cost local and regional jails in Virginia \$830,000 in that fiscal year alone, according to a new report from The Commonwealth Institute, an economic policy research organization based in Richmond. On top of these known per capita / per night costs of incarceration, voluntarily holding federally-responsible individuals in local jails also makes local governments vulnerable to legal liability.

“Housing detainees, establishing local ICE programs, and maneuvering the related legal issues all increase costs for local governments -- costs that are not reimbursed by the federal government,” explains Institute Research Director Laura Goren.

The report discusses three types of voluntary cooperation by local governments in Virginia with immigration enforcement. These include complying with detainer requests to hold individuals in local jails without a warrant by a judge, setting up 287(g) agreements to deputise local law enforcement to act as ICE agents, and renting bed space to federal authorities to hold individuals on federal immigration issues.

In 2017, a federal Executive Order expanded ICE’s priorities for the interior of the United States. Since then, ICE has issued 80 percent more immigration detainers to local jails, and partnerships between ICE and local police departments have more than doubled. This growth would be impossible without manpower from local law enforcement agencies and funds from state and local governments, which strains local budgets and resources. Voluntary cooperation with ICE also opens local governments to legal liability in cases where ICE requests may violate constitutional protections or jail crowding results in unsafe conditions for inmates.

"On top of the fiscal costs, aggressive immigration enforcement policies and rhetoric negatively impact communities, especially kids," says Goren. "Virginia localities can and should assess the full costs of participation in those enforcement policies so they can come to a clear-eyed decision around the use of local resources to carry out federal immigration enforcement activity."

The full report, *Federal Responsibility, Local Costs: Immigration Enforcement in Virginia*, can be found online at www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org.

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About The Commonwealth Institute

The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis provides credible, independent, and accessible information and analyses of fiscal and economic issues with particular attention to the impacts on low- and moderate income persons. Our products inform fiscal and budget policy debates and contribute to sound decisions that improve the well-being of individuals, communities and Virginia as a whole. Visit www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org for more information.