

SHERIFF & DEPUTY

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WIN, PLACE, SHOW

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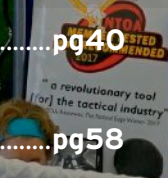
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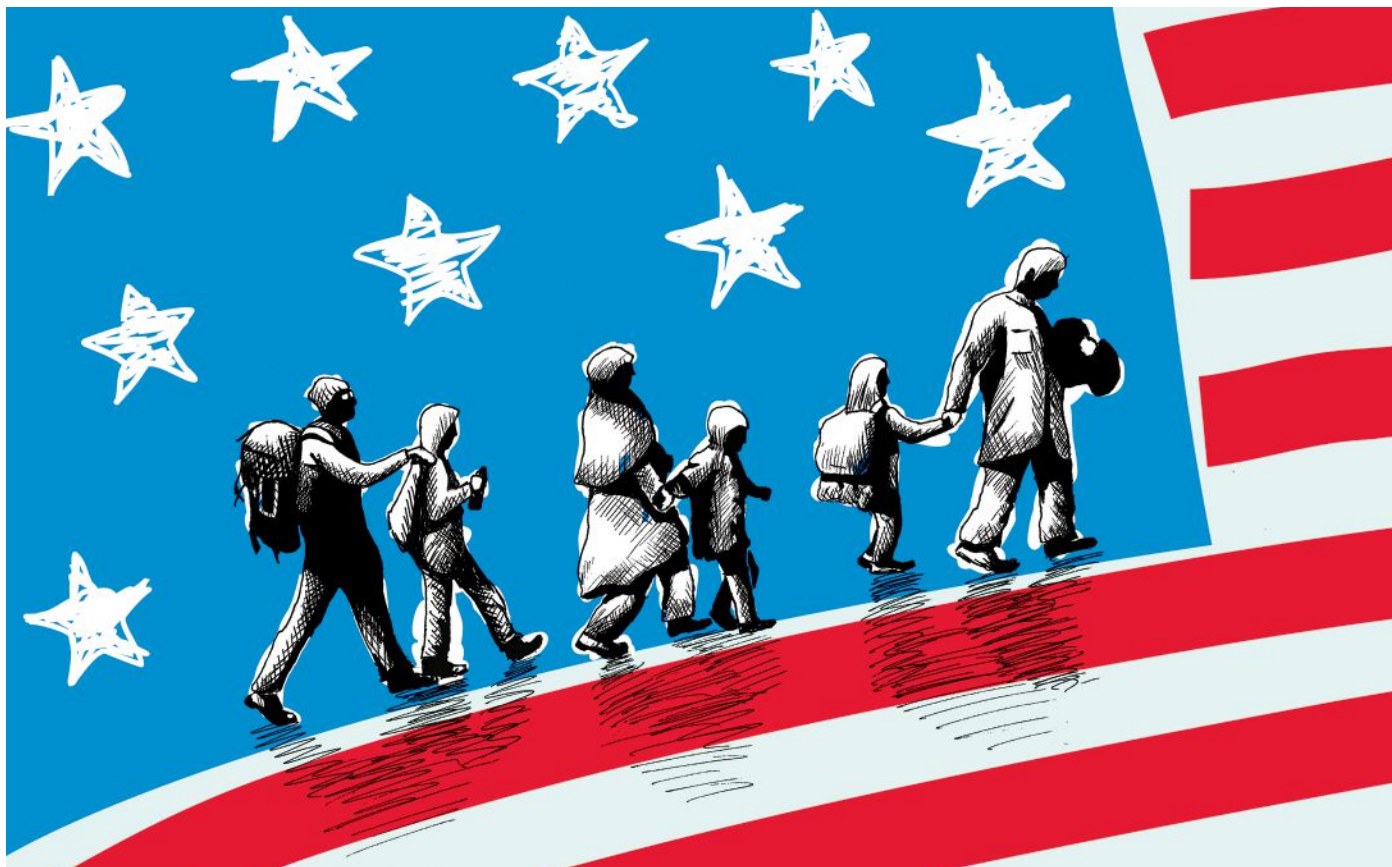
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BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Sheriffs must work with immigrant communities to ensure that crimes against the undocumented don't go unreported

By Michael LaRiviere



She is undocumented and living in your community. She has been working for several years at a local hotel to support her 3-year-old daughter and herself. One night after leaving work, she was approached by three gang members and violently raped and beaten unconscious. After regaining consciousness, she made her way to a friend's house, where she told her friend she recognized one of her attackers as a member of the gang that had recently robbed a co-worker at gunpoint. When her friend offered to call the police to report what happened to her, she begged her friend not to call because the police would have her deported.

Although fictional for the purpose of this article, this pattern and others like

it play out across the country every day. Dangerous criminals not only prey on some of the most vulnerable people in our society, but also place the safety of the entire community and its law enforcement officers at risk.

Congress created a series of laws designed to offer immigration relief to immigrant victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, human trafficking, and violent crime so they can safely cooperate with law enforcement without risking deportation. These laws include the U visa, designed for crime victims; the T visa, for victims of trafficking; and "self-petitioning" under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). All have been successful in encouraging immigrant crime victims to come forward and

seek help from law enforcement. Research from the National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project (NIWAP) says that once the victim has filed for immigration relief, 50% of U visa victims and 36% of VAWA self-petitioners file police reports following crimes.

Enforcement and empowerment

When scenarios discourage victims from coming forward, criminals can continue committing violent crimes without fear of arrest. We—as those tasked to serve and protect—must overcome the barriers between our agencies and the immigrant populations in our communities. How we do this varies depending on the agency and the community, as well as actual and perceived barriers.

