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## County, police union in showdown over illegal-immigration policy

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Montgomery County and the Fraternal Order of Police union could be headed to court over the county police department's policy for handling illegal immigrants, according to the union's lawyer.

FOP attorney Paul Stein said the county's policy was "unconstitutional" and dangerous to the county's police officers and residents.

In a letter to County Attorney Leon Rodriguez, Stein asked for justification of the policy, which limits officers' ability to contact U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE.

Union officials have complained that the county's immigration policies are politically motivated and hamper efforts to gather information on suspected criminals.

In February, the county changed its policy so ICE would be contacted when police arrested anyone, including illegal immigrants, in a violent or handgun-related crime. The policy came in response to a string of high-profile violent crimes committed by illegal immigrants in the county.

In September, the police department sent out a memo to officers emphasizing that federal immigration authorities should not be contacted after arresting someone based on solely gang affiliation or immigration status.

The September memo also indicated that officers needed to first get approval from the department before assisting ICE agents.

That memo came after an illegal immigrant, who said he was a former gang member, accused police of assaulting him and turning him over to ICE after he complained about the department.

Rodriguez told The Examiner he believed the county's policy was legal, but has not responded directly to the union. County Executive Ike Leggett and police department officials have said the policy helps foster a sense of trust between the police officers and the county's illegal immigrant population.

Stein said the union wanted to avoid a legal showdown, but if there were issues that couldn't be resolved, then "a court might have to resolve it."

He said his officers felt handcuffed in doing their jobs, which include regularly communicating with other government agencies.

The policy "on its face and in application limits our police officers from communicating with ICE until some horrible or horrendous crime occurs, such as first-degree murder, multiple murders, abduction of a 16-year-old for immoral purposes, first-degree sex assault," Stein said.

Stein also pointed out that federal law prohibited the county from "restricting communication" from its officers to ICE "regarding immigration status of any individual."

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