

First, some history: When humans arrived on this continent, there were no Keelers among them. Nor were there McCaffreys or Caracappas. Except for the indigenous peoples that Europeans displaced, we all have immigrant roots. Those of us who are Irish or Italian should remember that our forebears didn't have it easy. The sign "No Irish Need Apply" appeared in store windows. Italians were called nasty names. Then the Immigration Act of 1924 sharply reduced annual immigration, setting aside 85% of it for Northern and Western Europe and only 15% for Eastern and Southern Europe, including Italy. That Congress did not like Italians.

That bit of history is important, given what I'm proposing: that Suffolk County follow the example of Salem, Massachusetts, whose police chief put out a statement saying this:

The Salem Police Department does not and is not authorized to enforce federal immigration law. We recognize that there is concern, particularly in our immigrant community, about what the future might bring. We will continue to adhere to our mandate to protect the safety of **all** Salem residents and visitors, regardless of their immigration status.

You could direct new Police Commissioner Kevin Catalina to issue a similar statement. Yes, the new Department of Justice warns that local governments resisting federal immigration forces will be prosecuted. But will they follow through on that threat?

Keep in mind: It's a federal crime for men to decline to register for the draft at age 18, but the Justice Department never prosecutes non-registrants. There are too many. The same is likely to be true with the many resisters against this heartless roundup. Besides, what are the chances that this DOJ would prosecute the legislature and police department of this staunchly Republican county?

Finally, let me remind you that this legislature has acted to help immigrants. In 1985, Legislator Jim Morgo was in a restaurant watching the World Series and chatting with an immigrant employee. That worker mentioned his daughter's health problems, and Morgo said he should take her to a county health clinic. But the worker feared that someone in the clinic might ask about immigration status. The next time Morgo went to that restaurant, the proprietor told him that the immigrant employee had never returned to work after that chat with Morgo, a government official.

So Morgo sponsored and the Republican-majority legislature passed a resolution prohibiting county employees from asking about the citizenship of applicants for most health or human services.

In other words, this legislature has acted to help immigrants, and you can do it again. So please remember your immigrant origins. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 25 about welcoming strangers. And remember this admonition in Leviticus 19: "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born."