

Voces de la Frontera: Civil rights groups & attorneys expose Acting Sheriff Schmidt's true record on immigration & human rights abuses

Posted on Friday, Aug 10, 2018

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, August 9th, 2018

Contact: Sam Singleton-Freeman, 414-469-9206, sfreeman@vdlf.org

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN — On Thursday, August 9th, attorney James Gende, representatives of the Coalition for Justice, and Voces de la Frontera Action held a joint press conference to address Acting Sheriff Richard Schmidt's role in the deaths in the Milwaukee County Jail. Gende is representing four families whose loved ones died in the jail, including Shadé Swayzer, whose newborn daughter Laliah died after Shadé gave birth in the county jail in July 2016. Schmidt is a codefendant in at least four wrongful death civil rights lawsuits. Christine Neumann-Ortiz of Voces de la Frontera Action also responded to Schmidt's misleading comments concerning his collaboration with the Trump Administration and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the separation of Milwaukee immigrant families.

"While Clarke was out campaigning in 2016, it was Richard Schmidt who was in charge of the jail and the rest of the sheriff's department," said Attorney Gende. "Sheriff Schmidt was in charge of the jail facility for many years, and in the event that he wanted changes made, he could have advised his superiors. If Clarke was unwilling to do it, he could have gone to the County Executive. Former Inspector Schmidt had every opportunity during the course of his running of the jail to make changes. It is a continuation of Sheriff Clarke's policies that you're going to see going forward with this current administration."

According to the Sheriff's Office website, Schmidt, who was Clarke's longtime assistant, has been in charge of Milwaukee County Jail guards and staff since 2006. Clarke placed him in charge of day-to-day operations in the department in August 2010. Seven people died in the 18-month period at the jail leading up to December 2017 while Schmidt was in charge, including two who died after he became Acting Sheriff following Clarke's August 31, 2017 resignation.

In an angry press conference late Wednesday, August 8th, Schmidt affirmed that he has continued Clarke's policy of handing over Milwaukee residents over to ICE for deportation and separation from their families. Additionally, Schmidt misleadingly claimed to have withdrawn David Clarke's 287g application to turn his deputies into de facto ICE agents.

"When a delegation from the Coalition for People's Sheriff met with Schmidt to ask him to withdraw the 287g application after he was named interim sheriff following Clarke's resignation, he refused to do so," said Christine Neumann-Ortiz, Executive Director of Voces de la Frontera Action. "The very day that the federal government announced it had not accepted Schmidt and Clarke's 287g application, Schmidt's spokeswoman insisted to reporters that the application was still under review. Other jurisdictions withdrew their applications, but Schmidt refused to. On the contrary, it is the people of Wisconsin who rose up in two enormous Day without Latinx & Immigrants general strikes in 2017 as well as the many elected officials, organizations, and victims of the Sheriff's Department abuse of power who spoke out, who deserve credit for defeating 287g in Milwaukee County."

"Sheriff Schmidt has admitted that he is engaging in warrantless collaboration with Trump to separate Milwaukee families," continued Neumann-Ortiz. "Schmidt's unconstitutional collaboration with ICE increases discrimination and makes community members afraid to report crimes, making all less safe. In a second meeting after Schmidt had been de facto appointed by Governor Walker to take over for Clarke, we again asked Schmidt to implement a policy of non-collaboration with ICE. We urged him to officially break with David Clarke and join the hundreds of Sheriffs around the country who no longer comply with ICE's unconstitutional requests to provide information or to imprison people past their release date, unless those requests were accompanied by a judge's warrant, ensuring due process. Once people have been found not guilty, have been awarded bail, or been ordered released, they have a Constitutional right to return to their communities and families. Instead, Schmidt has handed them over to ICE. Schmidt's collaboration with ICE is part of Trump's machinery of mass deportation that is leading to the

breakup of families at the border and in Wisconsin at a tragic level. Schmidt is the candidate of David Clarke, Scott Walker, and Donald Trump.”

According to recently released federal records, Schmidt received 84 requests from ICE to hand over Milwaukee residents for deportation and separation from their families from September 1, 2017, the day he took office, through April of this year. In response to questions, Schmidt claimed to be ignorant of detainer requests, but he did not deny that he has continued Clarke’s policy of complying with detainer requests, and he affirmed that he does hand community members over to ICE. Federal courts have repeatedly found warrantless ICE detainer requests to be unconstitutional. According to the non-partisan Immigrant Legal Resource Center, the Milwaukee County Sheriff’s Office accepts ICE detainer requests, notifies ICE when immigrant community members are released, and has no limits on ICE interrogation or prohibitions against residents about immigration status. Schmidt’s unconstitutional collaboration with ICE makes the county vulnerable to civil rights litigation.