

# California City Accused of "Profiting" from Undocumented Immigrants

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Pro-immigrant activists and the [American Civil Liberties Union](#) have accused officials in the Southern California city of Escondido of generating ongoing profits from undocumented immigrants by operating highway checkpoints ostensibly targeting drunk drivers and people driving without licenses.

The ACLU of San Diego & Imperial Counties issued a report questioning the rationale for the roadblocks and asked that an independent audit be performed on the program with the purpose of ensuring that the city is not obtaining illegal profits from seizing vehicles.

The checkpoints "are really for immigration, not to identify drunk drivers, and they are resulting in a lack of confidence in the police, fear, panic and separation of families," Benjamin Prado, an activist with the American Friends Service Committee in San Diego, told Efe.

The report, "Wrong Turn: Escondido's Checkpoints and Impound Practices Examined," accuses the city of using the roadblocks as a way to quickly collect millions of dollars, at the same time that it is threatening undocumented immigrants and their families.

Nearly half of the 145,000 people living in Escondido are Hispanic, and they have confronted an anti-immigrant climate in recent years that included a 2006 law prohibiting renting to undocumented people, a measure eventually found to be unconstitutional in the courts.

Activists accuse the city of seeking ways to get around a state law that since Jan. 1 limits the ability of police to confiscate automobiles at roadblocks if the only offense committed by the driver is to be driving without a license, something that the ACLU says was used by Escondido as a tool against undocumented people.

Up until 2009, Escondido had set up roadblocks focused solely on making sure people were driving with valid licenses, a practice that was eliminated in the face of the threat of lawsuits, though not before authorities impounded about 1,000 vehicles.

The ACLU report says that the traffic roadblocks have become immigration roadblocks, something that has been aggravated by an unusual cooperation between the Escondido police and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which has agents waiting a short distance from the roadblocks ready to detain undocumented people.

"Escondido appears to be justifying discriminatory policies that negatively affect the immigrant population," Kevin Keenan, executive director of the San Diego ACLU, said. "The city ... should be advancing programs and policies that promote safety and unity, not fear and intimidation."

The state law requires that cities not charge towing companies more than the actual administrative costs, despite the fact that Escondido's calculations have risen sharply since 2004 "and include creative and suspect expenses," according to the ACLU.

"We are not prepared to say that Escondido is committing fraud, but the information that we have strongly suggests that a financial audit is in order," Keenan said.

Meanwhile, the city police chief, Jim Maher, called the ACLU report biased and said that the roadblocks are designed to make the streets safer, and he also denied that they have any relationship with generating profits

Read more: <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2012/03/14/california-city-accused-profiting-from-undocumented-immigrants/>