

Community Demands Transparency, Accountability, and an End to 287(g) Following Oconee County Operation

July 8, 2025

We, the undersigned community members, immigrants' rights advocates, and allies, are raising serious concerns regarding the June 18 enforcement operation conducted at Puerto Nuevo, a well-established and beloved Mexican restaurant in Oconee County. This operation resulted in the arrest and detention of at least 10 individuals, some of them now held in Folkston, Georgia. This operation has left our community with more questions than answers.

Though officials have attempted to downplay the incident as a human trafficking investigation that was unrelated to immigration enforcement, the facts tell a different story. To start, no one was charged with trafficking-related offenses and most of the approximately 10 individuals who were arrested were not charged with *any* criminal offense. Rather, most arrestees appear to have been immediately transferred into the custody of ICE and are now being held in a Georgia immigration detention facility. This matches eyewitness accounts, which report that 8 to 10 undocumented individuals were arrested and that federal agents were heavily present at both the restaurant and the neighboring building, where temporary housing had been set up. Contrary to early rumors, no one was living in the restaurant itself, and only two individuals were officially charged with Disorderly Conduct. The community is now demanding clarity: Was this a criminal investigation, or an immigration raid disguised as one?

The enforcement was deeply traumatizing, especially as onlookers bearing Trump flags stood outside, laughing and watching. Hispanic residents—including U.S. citizens—report increased fear of racial profiling and worry that simply looking or sounding Latino could make them a target for future raids.

Meanwhile, officials have failed to offer basic transparency about what occurred, who was detained, and whether any victims of human trafficking were identified. If there are survivors of trafficking involved, we urge that they be identified promptly and receive the full range of trauma-informed services and protections they are entitled to. Survivors deserve dignity, safety, and healing—not to be overlooked or caught in the shadows of enforcement headlines.

What we have seen so far is the detention of workers, many of whom community members describe as longstanding, tax-paying contributing individuals who were paid regularly, provided housing, and reportedly treated with dignity by their employers. We are concerned that the enforcement approach taken may have harmed workers rather than protected them, damaging local businesses, disrupting families, and eroding trust in law enforcement across the region. Many Hispanic businesses were reportedly closed in the aftermath of the Puerto Nuevo operation because owners feared for the safety of their workers.

This operation has reignited long-standing tensions stemming from Oconee County Sheriff Mike Crenshaw's decision to sign onto a [287\(g\) Warrant Service Officer agreement](#) with ICE on March 27. This type of agreement, under Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, has eroded trust and public safety in communities across the country. When federal immigration officials use local law enforcement agents to carry out a mass deportation agenda, members of immigrant communities are less likely to report crimes or come forward as witnesses regarding matters of local safety. Despite a County Council meeting in February 2025, during which 23 out of 25 speakers opposed 287(g), the sheriff moved forward via an internal vote, never publicly justifying the decision and reportedly misleading local faith leaders who had asked for alignment with values of family and dignity.

Our Community Demands:

1. Immediate termination of Oconee County's 287(g) agreement
2. A full, public accounting of the Puerto Nuevo operation, including the number of people detained.
3. Access to legal aid, housing, and trauma-informed services for anyone identified as a victim of human trafficking.
4. Clear protocols ensuring that victims are not handcuffed, criminalized, or deported.
5. A public apology and explanation from the Oconee County Sheriff for bypassing public input.

Signed,

ACLU of South Carolina

Rev. Ramfis Moulrier, Iglesia Foothills

Oconee County Democratic Party

Indivisible-Clemson

Rev. Hillary Taylor, United Methodist Minister in Extension Ministry, Greenville, SC

Lorena Arredondo, Puerto Nuevo

Charleston Immigrant Coalition

Rev. Susie Smith

Edgar Arroyo, La Estrella Supermarket, Walhalla