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## Del Valle residents grow anxious over Bastrop sheriff's weekend patrols

*Aug 30, 2018 By Brandon Mulder, Austin Community Newspapers Staff*

Del Valle residents are on edge after learning about the Bastrop County sheriff's office's plans to increase traffic patrols over Labor Day weekend.

On Thursday afternoon, after learning about the operation from an unnamed source within the sheriff's office, the Austin-based community activist group Grassroots Leadership made a [Facebook post](#) saying that Bastrop Sheriff Maurice Cook "was planning to conduct another traffic checkpoint in the Del Valle area over the holiday weekend" — similar to one conducted on June 23 in the Stony Point neighborhood that [resulted in 16 people sent to immigration authorities for deportation proceedings](#).

Two hours later after Grassroots Leadership's post, the sheriff's office [issued a statement on Facebook](#) announcing that the department will be increasing its "traffic patrol presence in order to identify unsafe drivers and vehicles being operated in an unlawful manner" over the holiday weekend.

The post does not say whether the traffic patrols will be focusing on any particular area of the county as had happened during the June 23 operation, when deputies focused on the heavily-Latino Stony Point neighborhood, according to a [sheriff's memo](#). Cook has denied accusations that the operation targeted immigrants and described it as a routine law enforcement tactic.

Cook did not immediately return requests for additional information on this weekend's patrols.

Grassroots Leadership is also asking for volunteers to "stand guard and keep an eye out" for any indication of a traffic operation targeting immigrant drivers.

"The reason why we felt the urgency to do it is because of (Cook's) past behavior pattern," said Grassroots Leadership organizer Alicia Torres. "We know that there's a very high likelihood that he would do this."

Cook's June operation — which arrested people for Class C misdemeanors such as driving without a valid license, changing lanes without signaling or having obscured license plates — drew criticism from local faith groups and the Mexican consul for the Austin area.

The Del Valle faith group [Bastrop Interfaith](#) and Mexican Consul Carlos González Gutiérrez held meetings with Cook in July asking him to soften his "zero tolerance" approach to minor traffic infractions, to cease targeting immigrant communities, and to encourage his deputies to inform people they pull over of their right not to respond to questions related to immigration status.

Cook made no commitment to their latter request, community organizers said after the meeting.

### **Residual fear**

Many Stony Point residents continue to feel the anxiety wrought by June's arrests.

Ramiro Alonzo Jr. was preparing for his first day of college Sunday when he drove his two cousins to the Dollar General outside his neighborhood to buy school supplies. On his way back, he was pulled over for missing a front license plate, which he kept displayed on his dashboard.

Two deputies peppered Alonzo and his cousins with various questions, including some about their immigration status. All confirmed they were U.S. citizens.

Alonzo, 19, has lived his whole life at Stony Point, but said he only began regularly noticing patrol vehicles stationed outside his neighborhood after the June 23 operation.

"They go to the stores, they park outside the stores by the street. They're not there every day, but they're there most of the days of the week," he said.

Some of his friends and neighbors are undocumented immigrants, he said, and the possibility of being detained by law enforcement haunts the area.

"Some of my friends' parents were taken away" that day, Alonzo said.

Alonzo said he ended up getting arrested that Sunday night for an outstanding warrant he wasn't aware he had. He spent a day-and-a-half in the county jail and missed his first day of classes at Texas State Technical College before he was able to bond out.

His encounter with the deputies that night gives Edie Clark, a Bastrop Interfaith leader, reason to believe Cook's increased patrols this weekend may have consequences for the neighborhood again.

"It does seem to us that he is targeting the area around Stony Point," she said. "From his statement you don't see that, but we are concerned about it."