



TERRA LAWSON-REMER

CHAIR

SUPERVISOR, THIRD DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: October 21, 2025

18

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**STOPPING ICE IMPERSONATORS AND COUNTERFEIT GEAR SUPPLIERS
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

Over the past year, communities have witnessed an alarming escalation in raids carried out by masked, unidentified agents. A CNN investigation released in October 2025 found that incidents of fraudsters and predators impersonating Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have surged this year, more than in the past four presidential administrations combined, with reports ranging from assault and kidnapping to extortion.ⁱ Fewer than half of the impersonation cases led to criminal charges, and only one resulted in federal prosecution, evidence that a significant enforcement gap is leaving communities exposed.

The results are predictable: when legitimate law enforcement blurs the line, predators step in. Earlier this year, a man posing as an ICE officer in Charleston, South Carolina, threatened a woman with deportation before sexually assaulting herⁱⁱ. Weeks later in Brooklyn Heights, New York, another impersonator identifying himself as “Immigration” forced a woman into a stairwell, attempted rape, and robberyⁱⁱⁱ. In San Diego County, a San Ysidro man was indicted for impersonating an ICE agent to defraud more than 25 immigrants, charging each up to \$20,000 with fake Department of Homeland Security (DHS) documents and a counterfeit badge^{iv}. These cases prove the stakes: when residents cannot distinguish between real officers and impostors, criminals are empowered to terrorize communities.

State and national leaders are sounding the alarm. On March 18, California Attorney General Rob Bonta warned of rising “fake ICE officer” scams targeting immigrant families. On August 11, the Democratic Women’s Caucus issued a statement describing ICE’s own masked, unmarked operations as tactics that cause confusion, terror, and mistrust among the public^v:

“All our lives, we are taught to fear masked men in unmarked vehicles. We learn we should run from such men to avoid being kidnapped, sexually assaulted, or killed. Yet, ICE is

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increasingly conducting raids and arrests in masks, plain-clothes, without visible identification or badges, using unmarked vehicles – tactics that cause confusion, terror, and mistrust among the public. These tactics invited perpetrators of violence against women to take advantage of the chaos by impersonating masked ICE agents in order to target and sexually assault women”

Their words reflect a deeper truth: when federal agencies abandon transparency, they open the door for predators to weaponize the same fear.

Compounding the crisis is the ease of access to counterfeit law enforcement gear. Online retailers openly sell “ICE” jackets, DHS patches, and imitation tactical vests, some ranking among the top sellers on Amazon^{vi}. These products arm predators with the trappings of authority. It should not be easier to buy a fake ICE jacket online than a bottle of cough medicine at the local pharmacy. Yet that is today’s reality.

The County cannot allow this danger to go unchecked. When federal enforcement blurs the line between authority and intimidation, it falls to local governments to make sure our own spaces remain defined by transparency, safety, and trust. Today’s action

First, this item directs the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to pursue enforcement and litigation against counterfeit gear suppliers. County Counsel should explore litigation, cease-and-desist orders, and partnerships with state and federal regulators to curb the sale of fake ICE jackets, counterfeit patches, and other items that enable impersonation. Just as we have held corporations accountable for other predatory practices, we must act against those selling counterfeit gear that endangers the public.

Second, this action directs the CAO to prepare and transmit a letter of support for Senate Bill 2212, the Visible Identification Standards for Immigration-Based Law Enforcement Act (VISIBLE Act) as authored by Senator Alex Padilla. The bill would require immigration officers to display clear identification and prohibit face coverings that obscure who they are during enforcement actions. These are simple, commonsense protections—because every person has the right to know who is questioning them, and every legitimate officer should have nothing to hide. By supporting the VISIBLE Act, the County affirms its commitment to transparency, accountability, and the basic trust that must exist between government and the people it serves.

Taken together, these steps protect both residents and legitimate law enforcement. Families deserve to know with certainty who is at their door or stopping them on the street. Officers deserve not to have their authority undercut by impostors in knockoff uniforms. This is about protecting women walking home at night, parents dropping their kids at school, and restaurant workers at the end of a shift. It is about defending the integrity of law enforcement and ensuring that no San Diegan is left to wonder whether the person confronting them is an officer or a predator.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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1. Direct the CAO in consultation with County Counsel to pursue options for enforcement and litigation actions against the sale or distribution of counterfeit law enforcement gear,

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including coordination with state and federal partners to issue cease-and-desist orders and pursue civil or criminal penalties where appropriate. Return to the Board in closed session on an ongoing basis every 90 days with updates on their efforts, and options that the Board can elect to move forward with, through further direction.

2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to express the County's support for Senate Bill 2212, the Visible Identification Standards for Immigration-Based Law Enforcement Act (VISIBLE Act), consistent with Board Policy M-2.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This action strengthens public safety for all residents, particularly those most vulnerable to intimidation and exploitation. Immigrant families, low-income workers, and people seeking assistance at County facilities are disproportionately targeted by individuals posing as federal agents. These impersonations erode trust in government, deter residents from accessing vital services, and create an environment of fear that undermines community cohesion. This item helps ensure that every person can seek help, report crimes, and engage with County government without fear of deceit or abuse. The proposal advances the County's commitment to fair and equitable treatment under the law and to maintaining County facilities as safe and trusted spaces for all.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This action strengthens public trust and contributes to more resilient and cohesive communities. It aligns the County's broader sustainability goals by advancing governance practices that are transparent, ethical, and protective of community well-being.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with these recommendations. Funds for the actions requested are included in the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operational Plan based on existing staff time. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

Across the United States, incidents of individuals impersonating federal immigration officers have sharply increased, creating confusion, fear, and real harm in communities. A CNN investigation released in October 2025 found that reports of people posing as ICE agents have surged to levels not seen in previous administrations, with cases involving assault, kidnapping, extortion, and fraud. Fewer than half of those cases led to criminal charges, and only one resulted in federal prosecution, highlighting significant gaps in enforcement and accountability.

The consequences of this growing problem have been severe. In separate cases in South Carolina and New York, perpetrators posing as immigration officers assaulted and robbed women after threatening them with deportation. In San Diego County, a San Ysidro resident was indicted for defrauding more than two dozen immigrants while impersonating an ICE agent, using falsified

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Department of Homeland Security documents and counterfeit badges. These incidents underscore the danger when residents cannot readily distinguish between legitimate officers and impostors.

Law enforcement and public officials have expressed growing concern over these developments. In March 2025, California Attorney General Rob Bonta warned of “fake ICE officer” scams targeting immigrant families. In August, the Democratic Women’s Caucus issued a statement criticizing the use of masks and unmarked vehicles during immigration enforcement operations, noting that such tactics “cause confusion, terror, and mistrust among the public” and may embolden impersonators seeking to exploit that fear.

Compounding this threat is the widespread availability of counterfeit law enforcement gear. Online retailers continue to sell imitation “ICE” jackets, DHS patches, and tactical vests—some among the most popular items in their categories. Easy access to these materials allows criminals to project false authority and deceive victims, undermining both public safety and trust in legitimate law enforcement.

To address this gap, today’s item proposes to:

1. Pursue enforcement and litigation against counterfeit gear suppliers
2. Support federal legislation, the Visible Identification Standards for Immigration-Based Law Enforcement Act (VISIBLE Act), which would require immigration officers to display clear identification and prohibit the use of masks that obscure identity during operations.

These combined actions aim to protect residents, strengthen community trust, and uphold the integrity of legitimate law enforcement throughout San Diego County.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today’s proposed actions advance the County of San Diego’s 2025–2030 Strategic Initiatives of Sustainability, Equity, Empowerment, Community, and Justice by strengthening public trust, protecting residents from intimidation and fraud, and ensuring all San Diegans can safely access government services.

Respectfully submitted,



TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Supervisor, Third District

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A: CNN ICE Impersonator Incidents Rise During Trumps Second Term (Oct 2, 2025)

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ⁱ <https://www.cnn.com/2025/10/02/us/ice-impersonator-incidents-rise-invs-vis>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.live5news.com/2025/01/29/man-accused-impersonating-ice-officer-sexually-assaulting-woman-he-threatened-deport/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/ice-agent-impersonation-attempted-brooklyn-heights/>

^{iv} <https://www.cbs8.com/article/news/local/san-diego-man-accused-of-posing-as-ice-agent/509-ee54dace-897e-492d-a1f4-464bfe94c58f>

^v <https://juliabrownley.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/dwc-letter-to-dhs-on-ice-impersonators-and-women-s-safety.pdf>

^{vi} <https://www.newsweek.com/ice-immigration-jacket-best-seller-amazon-2035114>