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Toronto police chief says border agency fears about policy premature

By MIKE OLIVEIRA

TORONTO (CP) - A plea by the Canada Border Services Agency to help fight terrorism by Toronto police don't ask, don't tell policy dealing with illegal immigrants was met with a Tuesday from the police chief.

The policy is the first of its kind in Canada and directs Toronto officers to avoid asking ro about a suspect or citizen's immigration status. It was drafted to encourage more commi operation with police and allay fears that illegal immigrants would be deported if they ev authorities.

Members of the Toronto Police Services Board chided representatives of the federal agen for criticizing the policy without having read the whole document, and for fears that polic Blair said were unfounded.

Your concerns, I have to say, are a little premature, Blair said.

The policy our board adopted really gave us the ability to deal in a more sensitive and cc way with victims of crime and with our witnesses, and it simply says in the absence of bc reasons to ask (about citizenship), we're not asking.

But if those bona fide reasons do exist, we'll continue to (ask).

But John Gillan, regional director for the border agency, said the policy would cripple co-between different law enforcement agencies and could help people get away with crimina including terrorism.

Our post 9-11 reality - increased security concerns, threats from organized crime, comm concerns - have reinforced the need for ... timely information sharing and co-operation b enforcement agencies at all levels, he said.

Failure to share information and co-ordinate our efforts can lead to undesirable and perh and unfortunate consequences.

He pointed to a recent example of the border agency helping to identify a victim in a Tor as a potential suspect. The agency provided police with information on immigration viola serious criminal charges that resulted in the man being extradited to Canada from the U

We want to make sure we have the maximum opportunity to apprehend anybody that's i significant criminal activity, Gillan said. We're very concerned that ... police officers do n basic questions anymore.

But there was no support on the police board for the border agency's message, and one Hamlin Grange, said he was taken aback by its tone.

For a moment there I thought I was listening to a presentation from Homeland Security States, he said.

Police are still in the process of finalizing and implementing the policy, which will go before again in February for review.

Lawyers and citizen groups who advocated for the policy are anxious to see it go ahead, the border agency for trying to stop it.

Policing and immigration functions are separate functions, and for the police to do their job shouldn't be harassing people about their immigrant status, said lawyer Peter Rosenthal, the policy and gave police a legal opinion on it.

Inquiring into the immigration status of victims and/or witnesses discourages the reporting and results in the failure to provide protection to some Toronto residents.

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