



News Releases

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Harris County Sheriff's Office first of several sites in the nation to receive full interoperability technology to help identify criminal aliens

*Departments of Homeland Security and Justice providing more
identity information to local officers about non U.S. citizen criminal
arrests*

HOUSTON - The Harris County Sheriff's Office became the first of several law enforcement agencies that will receive additional identity information about non U.S. citizens they arrest, through a new, automated fingerprint-based process that will help identify criminal aliens.

The Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Justice (DOJ) have made enhancements to their respective biometric systems-the Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT) and the Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System (IAFIS)-to improve the interoperability of the two systems and enable this new information sharing process. IDENT and IAFIS interoperability is the cornerstone of Secure Communities, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE's) comprehensive plan to identify and remove criminal aliens from local communities. In collaboration with DOJ and other DHS components, ICE plans to expand this capability to 50 additional state and local law enforcement agencies throughout the nation by next spring.

"Interoperability will create a virtual ICE presence at every local jail, allowing us to identify and ultimately remove dangerous incarcerated criminal aliens from our communities," said Julie L. Myers, Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for ICE.

"Using this technology, we will build upon the remarkable success we have had working with state and local law enforcement and we will revolutionize the process of identifying criminal aliens in custody."

"US VISIT's innovative use of biometrics is all about providing comprehensive, reliable information to decision makers when and where they need it," said US VISIT Director Robert Mocny. "By enhancing the interoperability of DHS's and the FBI's biometric systems, we are able to give federal, state and local decision makers information that helps them better protect our

communities and our nation."

"Under this plan, ICE will be utilizing FBI system enhancements that allow improved information sharing at the state and local law enforcement level based on positive identification of incarcerated criminal aliens. Additionally, ICE and the FBI are working together to take advantage of the strong relationships already forged between the FBI and state and local law enforcement necessary to assist ICE in achieving their goals," said FBI Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Assistant Director Tom Bush.

Sheriff Tommy Thomas said, "Illegal immigration is a complex issue, and the best solutions to complex issues are found when law enforcement agencies at all levels work together, in cooperation with the community, to find innovative new approaches to resolving such issues. For many years, the Harris County Sheriff's Office has worked with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to identify illegal aliens being booked into the Harris County Jails. As the first law enforcement agency in the nation to gain full interoperability with the biometric identification systems of the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice, the Harris County Sheriff's Office demonstrates a continued willingness and ability to seek out new partnerships to better combat criminal activity. As evidenced by our participation in this new program coupled with our employees receiving 287(g) training, the Harris County Sheriff's Office remains committed to working with federal, state, and local counterparts to keep our community safe."

As part of the routine booking process at most detention centers, an individual's fingerprints are checked against IAFIS to obtain information about the detainee's criminal history. The new process will simultaneously check the detainee's fingerprints against the full IDENT system which holds biometrics based immigration records. If the individual's fingerprints match those of a non U.S. citizen, the new automated process notifies ICE's Law Enforcement Support Center (LESC) for officials to evaluate the case and take appropriate action when necessary. Additionally, the local law enforcement agency will receive biographic identification information about any non U.S. citizen they arrest for criminal charges. Law enforcement officers can use this information to verify the identity of the person they have arrested.

Harris County and other agencies including the Gaston (NC), Buncombe (NC), Henderson (NC), Wake (NC) and Dallas county sheriffs' offices have participated in a pilot version of interoperability between the DHS and DOJ databases. Under the pilot, these sites received limited immigration history information. Local law enforcement officials are not permitted to take action against immigration violators unless trained and authorized by DHS. Harris, Gaston, Henderson and Wake County Sheriffs' Offices have signed 287(g) agreements with ICE which authorizes their trained officers to enforce immigration law under ICE supervision. Under the 287(g) program the trained officers already have access to the DHS databases; however officers have to run fingerprints separately on the IAFIS and IDENT systems. This new interoperable system will streamline the process for jail officers and fully check both the criminal history and the immigration records of everyone processed into the jail. Currently only those referred to officers with immigration enforcement authority have their immigration histories checked.

DHS's ICE and US-VISIT program are working with the FBI's CJIS division to make this program possible. US VISIT manages the IDENT database, and CJIS manages the IAFIS database. ICE's LESL serves as a national enforcement operations center by providing timely immigration status and identity information to local, state and federal law enforcement agencies

on aliens suspected, arrested or convicted of criminal activity.

-- ICE --

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.

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