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News Releases

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5 additional Texas counties become part of new program to enhance identification and removal of criminal aliens *Criminal and immigration records of all sheriff's office inmates to be checked*

LAREDO, Texas - Five south Texas county sheriffs' offices - Bexar, Willacy, Dimmitt, Webb, and Zapata - have been added to the growing list of law enforcement agencies to receive biometrics-based immigration history information about inmates via the new Secure Communities program.

Secure Communities, which is administered by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), streamlines the process for ICE to determine if an arrested individual is a removable criminal alien.

Under the program, everyone booked into these county jails has their fingerprints screened in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) immigration databases. Prior to the advent of Secure Communities, as part of the standard booking process, these fingerprints were only checked for criminal history information in the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) biometric system.

If any fingerprints match those of someone in DHS's biometric system, the new automated process notifies ICE and the jail that submitted the fingerprints. ICE evaluates each case to determine the individual's immigration status and takes appropriate enforcement action after offenders complete their prison terms. Top priority is given to aliens who pose the greatest threat to public safety, such as those with prior convictions for major drug offenses, murder, rape, robbery, and kidnapping.

"Secure Communities is an ICE initiative to more broadly manage and modernize the processes used to identify and ultimately remove dangerous criminal aliens from our communities," said Executive Director for ICE Secure Communities David Venturella. "Our goal with this ICE effort is to use information sharing to prevent criminal aliens from being released back into the community, with little or no additional burden on our local law enforcement partners."

"The Webb County Sheriff's Department has been working side-by-side with ICE for many years in an effort to identify criminal aliens booked into our detention facilities," said Webb County Sheriff Martin Cuellar. "This new technology will enhance our partnership and bolster our commitment to keeping our communities safe."

"This is a win-win situation both for the community and law enforcement," said Bexar County Sheriff Amadeo Ortiz. "We will be able to identify illegal immigrants who commit crimes in Bexar County and get them in the process for deportation, and it does not require additional funds or manpower from us." Secure Communities enhances the ongoing joint efforts between our south Texas county sheriff offices and ICE to identify criminal aliens in their jails, and process them for deportation. Eventually, with DOJ and other DHS component collaboration, ICE plans to expand this capability to all state and local law enforcement agencies throughout the nation. More than 50 counties nationwide are currently participating in Secure Communities.

Secure Communities is part of DHS's comprehensive plan to distribute technology that links local law enforcement agencies to both FBI and DHS biometric systems. DHS's US-VISIT Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT) holds biometrics-based immigration records, while the FBI's Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System (IAFIS) contains biometrics-based criminal records.

"US-VISIT is proud to support the Secure Communities program, helping provide decision makers with comprehensive, reliable information 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," said FBI Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Acting Assistant Director Jerome M. Pender. "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 its goals."

Secure Communities is a key facet of ICE's enforcement priority to identify, locate and remove criminal aliens, building on the success of the agency's Criminal Alien Program. In fiscal year 2008, ICE identified more than 221,000 potentially removable aliens incarcerated nationwide. This fiscal year, the agency anticipates spending more than \$1 billion on such efforts, which in addition to Secure Communities, also includes expanding the agency's Criminal Alien Program and Fugitive Operations Program.

More information about ICE's Secure Communities effort is available at www.ice.gov.

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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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