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News Releases

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New ICE initiative uses biometrics to enhance identification and removal of criminal aliens from Prince William County *Now criminal and immigration records of all those arrested to be checked*

MANASSAS, Va. - Beginning Tuesday, law enforcement agencies in Prince William County will benefit from a new initiative developed by the Departments of Justice (DOJ) and Homeland Security (DHS) that modernizes the process used to accurately identify and remove dangerous criminal aliens from the community.

The initiative, Secure Communities, is administered by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Secure Communities enables ICE to determine whether an individual arrested by a participating state or local law enforcement agency is a dangerous criminal alien and take the appropriate action to remove the individual from the community.

The Secure Communities biometric identification technology is now accessible to more than 12 state and local law enforcement agencies in Prince William County that utilize the Prince William - Manassas Regional Adult Detention Center for booking. The program has already been implemented in more than 80 counties, including Fairfax, with nationwide coverage expected by the end of 2013.

Secure Communities is fundamentally different from other ICE programs, primarily because under Secure Communities, state and local law enforcement officials are not authorized to enforce immigration laws on behalf of ICE. ICE officials make immigration status determinations and take appropriate action under the law, consistent with ICE policies and regulations.

At the Prince William - Manassas Regional Adult Detention Center where trained officers are authorized to enforce immigration law via a 287(g) agreement, Secure Communities will provide technological enhancements to the collaborative efforts of ICE and the 287(g) officers in identifying dangerous criminal aliens. Secure Communities enhances the ongoing joint efforts by Prince William County and ICE to identify criminal aliens in the county's jail system and process them for deportation.

Formerly as part of the booking process, arrestees' fingerprints were taken and checked for criminal history information against the DOJ biometric system maintained by the FBI. With the implementation of Secure Communities in Prince William County, the fingerprint information will now be simultaneously checked against both the FBI criminal history records and the biometrics-based immigration records maintained by the DHS.

If any fingerprints match those of someone in DHS' biometric system, the new automated process notifies ICE. 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 a DHS initiative to more broadly manage and modernize the processes used to identify and ultimately remove dangerous criminal aliens from our communities," said Acting Secure Communities Executive Director Marc Rapp. "Our goal with this 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."

"Secure Communities is an effective tool, which will enhance the Adult Detention Center 287(g) program in further identifying criminal illegal aliens," said Superintendent of the Prince William-Manassas Regional Adult Detention Center Colonel Pete Meletis.

Secure Communities bolsters the ongoing joint efforts by ICE and participating law enforcement agencies in the United States. 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.

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 ICE, 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's Criminal Justice Information Services Division, Assistant Director, Daniel D. Roberts.

"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.