U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

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News Releases

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Polk County first in Iowa to benefit from ICE strategy to enhance the identification, removal of criminal aliens

Uses biometrics to prioritize immigration enforcement actions against convicted criminal aliens

DES MOINES, Iowa - On Tuesday, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) began using a new biometric information sharing capability in Polk County that helps federal immigration officials identify aliens, both lawfully and unlawfully present in the United States, who are booked into local law enforcement's custody for a crime. This capability is part of Secure Communities - ICE's comprehensive strategy to improve and modernize the identification and removal of criminal aliens from the United States.

Previously, fingerprint-based biometric records were taken of individuals charged with a crime and booked into custody and checked for criminal history information against the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System (IAFIS). Now, through enhanced information sharing between DOJ and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), fingerprint information submitted through the state to the FBI will be automatically checked against both the FBI criminal history records in IAFIS and the biometrics-based immigration records in DHS's Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT).

If fingerprints match those of someone in DHS's biometric system, the new automated process notifies ICE. ICE evaluates each case to determine the individual's immigration status and takes appropriate enforcement action. This includes aliens who are in lawful status and those who are present without lawful authority. Once identified through fingerprint matching, ICE will respond with a priority placed on aliens convicted of the most serious offenses first - such as those with convictions for major drug offenses, murder, rape and kidnapping.

"The Secure Communities strategy provides ICE with an effective tool to identify criminal aliens in local custody," said Secure Communities Executive Director David Venturella. "Enhancing public safety is at the core of ICE's mission. Our goal is to use biometric information sharing to remove criminal aliens, preventing them from being released back into the community, with little

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or no additional burden on our law enforcement partners."
With the expansion of the biometric information sharing capability to Polk County, ICE is now using it in 574 jurisdictions in 30 states. ICE expects to make it available in jurisdictions nationwide by 2013.

Polk County Sheriff Bill McCarthy stated, "We support this initiative because it is law-enforcement based and it enhances our public security. Furthermore, it is fair and equitable and applies to all persons in custody."

Since ICE began using this enhanced information sharing capability in October 2008, immigration officers have removed from the United States more than 9,800 criminal aliens convicted of Level 1 crimes, such as murder, rape and kidnapping. Additionally, ICE has removed more than 24,800 criminal aliens convicted of Level 2 and 3 crimes, including burglary and serious property crimes, which account for the majority of crimes committed by aliens. ICE does not regard aliens charged with, but not yet convicted of crimes, as "criminal aliens." Instead, a "criminal alien" is an alien convicted of a crime. In accordance with the Immigration and Nationality Act, ICE continues to take action on aliens subject to removal as resources permit.

The IDENT system is maintained by DHS's US-VISIT program and IAFIS is maintained by the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS).

"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 Daniel D. Roberts, assistant director of the FBI's CJIS Division. "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."
For more information, visit www.ice.gov/secure_communities.