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News Releases

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All West Virginia counties to benefit from ICE strategy to use biometrics to identify and remove aliens convicted of a crime

CHARLESTON, W.V.-On Tuesday, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) began using a federal information sharing capability in all West Virginia counties that uses biometrics to identify aliens, both lawfully and unlawfully present in the United States, who are booked into local law enforcement's custody for a crime. This information sharing 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 any fingerprints match those of someone in the 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. 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 is improving public safety every day by transforming the way ICE identifies aliens in the criminal custody of law enforcement," said John Morton, ICE Director. "Using this biometric information sharing tool enables ICE to prevent the release of convicted criminal aliens back into the community when they complete their sentences."

"The West Virginia State Police is pleased to become a part of this advanced identification program. With our recent addition of electronic fingerprint capture and submission capabilities, we are taking advantage of the most current technologies available to law enforcement to identify and capture the criminal," said Colonel Tim Pack, Superintendent of the West Virginia State Police. "As more agencies join this information sharing effort, federal, state and local entities are able to provide more timely collection data to rapidly identify and take appropriate action with the criminal alien element."

With the expansion of the biometric information sharing capability statewide in West Virginia, ICE is now using it in 746 jurisdictions in 34 states. By 2013, ICE plans to be able to respond to all fingerprint matches generated nationwide through IDENT/IAFIS interoperability.

Since ICE began using this enhanced information sharing capability in October 2008, immigration officers have removed from the United States more than 46,800 aliens convicted of a crime. 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 Mochny. "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."

ICE is currently using the federal biometric information sharing capability in jurisdictions in the following states: Arkansas, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Carolina, New Mexico, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia and West Virginia.

For more information, visit www.ice.gov/secure_communities (http://www.ice.gov/secure_communities/).

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.