

IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT

Activists: ICE rounding up noncriminals

■ **Activists released Homeland Security documents suggesting a majority of immigrants deported after being booked at county jails had no criminal background.**

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has touted an almost 2-year-old program under which county jails forward suspects' fingerprints to Homeland Security as a key tool in quickly identifying dangerous foreign criminals.

But internal ICE documents released Tuesday by immigrant and civil rights activists contradict the agency's claim, according to an analysis of the documents by the advocates which include the respected Center for Constitutional Rights and the immigration justice clinic at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, both in New York City.

BOOKING PROGRAM

Release of the documents is the latest salvo by immigrant rights advocates who believe ICE has become a rogue agency bent on undermining civil rights and President Barack Obama's stated policy of focusing on dangerous foreign criminals. The documents outline the work of the ICE booking center program known as Secure Communities.

Suspects booked at a county jail linked to the program have their finger-

prints shared with several agencies, including Homeland Security. If ICE, a Homeland Security agency, is interested in one of the foreign suspects, it lodges an immigration "detainer" or hold so the suspect cannot be immediately released. Before Secure Communities, immigration authorities relied on jail officials to alert them about foreign nationals in local jails or periodically checked local jail records themselves.

ICE says Secure Communities assists the agency in quickly identifying dangerous foreign criminals so they can be placed in deportation proceedings before being released on bail or their own recognizance.

The agency did not dispute the activists' findings. But ICE reiterated its belief that Secure Communities is crucial to shielding U.S. communities from dangerous foreign criminals.

"Secure Communities gives ICE the ability to work with our state and local law enforcement partners to identify criminal aliens who are already in their custody, expediting their removal and keeping our communities safer, part of the department's overall focus on identifying and removing convicted criminal aliens who pose a threat to public safety," said ICE spokesman Temple Black.

To date, he added, the program has identified more than 262,900 foreign nationals in jails and prisons who have been

charged with or convicted of criminal offenses, including more than 39,000 charged with or convicted of major violent or drug offenses. Black said the program led to the deportation of more than 34,600 convicted criminal foreigners, including more than 9,800 convicted of major violent or drug offenses.

The analysis of the documents by the activists, however, says that the majority or 79 percent of people deported in connection to Secure Communities were noncriminals or had been picked up by local police for relatively minor offenses, including traffic violations or petty juvenile mischief.

Among participants in a conference call for journalists to brief them on the documents, obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, was Jonathan Fried, executive director of the Homestead immigrant rights group WeCount!. He told the story of a young immigrant woman from Latin America deported after being booked at a Miami-Dade County jail. Fried believes ICE learned of the woman's undocumented status because of Secure Communities even though she had no criminal record.

"She was stopped by a . . . police officer returning from taking her children to school and charged with no valid driver license. As a result of Secure Communities, an immigration hold was placed on her and she



was deported, leaving her two young children without their mother, in the care of relatives," Fried said.

DEPORTATIONS

The activists' analysis also contained a county-by-county breakdown on the number of foreign nationals identified

through Secure Communities and subsequently deported.

Four counties in Florida — Miami-Dade, Broward, St. Lucie and Hillsborough — are among counties nationwide with the highest number of immigrants with no criminal backgrounds deported due to Secure Communities since

the program began, the analysis said.

Sixty-six percent of immigrants deported due to Secure Communities in Miami-Dade were non-criminals, according to the analysis.

The rate was 66 percent in Hillsborough, 71 percent in Broward and 79 percent in St. Lucie.