

Lake Co. program leads to 260 deportation cases

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Heriberto Rivera of Mexico is interviewed by Agent Victor Cortez of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency as the Lake County Sheriff's Department demonstrated the Criminal Alien Program.

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Prisoners Enrique Juarez, left, and Innocente Tolentino are taken by an agent from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to the ICE holding facility in Broadview for deportation.

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By identifying illegal aliens arrested in Lake County as soon as they come into the criminal justice system, the federal Criminal Alien Program has resulted in 260 deportation cases being opened since Sept. 1, Sheriff Mark Curran and other officials said Tuesday.

Administered by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement branch of the Department of Homeland Security, CAP allows ICE to place a detainer on any illegal immigrant arrested for a felony offense.

The detainer places an indelible mark on an inmate's paperwork that follows him or her through the system, and upon completion of the criminal proceedings against the inmate, results in their immediate transfer to ICE for deportation.

"The cost of illegal immigration to law enforcement and the criminal justice system is astronomical," said Curran, who touted the program at the Lake County jail as proof of the results of local law enforcement cooperation with the federal government. "We are a nation of immigrants, but we are a nation of laws as well, and we are enforcing the law in Lake County."

Curran said CAP is different from the ICE 287g program he has also applied to be a part of, because unlike 287g, his employees do not receive power to do any functions usually performed by ICE agents.

Gail Montenegro, public affairs officer for the six-state area covered by ICE's Chicago office, said the CAP program resulted in the opening of 221,085 deportation cases last year, up from 164,296 in 2007.

Not all those targeted for deportation have left the country, she said, because ICE waits for jail or prison sentences imposed on convicted criminals to be served before removing them from the country.

In Lake County, Curran said roughly 20 percent of the jail population at any given time is made up of illegal aliens and that there are currently 152 foreign-born individuals in his custody.

When a person identifies themselves as foreign-born while entering the jail, Corrections Chief Jennifer Witherspoon said that person's name and other identifying information are sent to ICE within an hour of the booking process.

Should ICE determine that the person is not a naturalized citizen, an agent is dispatched to the jail for an in-depth interview and records check before the issuance of a detainer.

At a demonstration of the process for the media Tuesday, Gustavo Ibaez-Calabara said he had been under an ICE detainer since his arrest for DUI and obstruction of justice.

Although he claimed to have worked steadily until recently since coming here from Mexico, Ibaez-Calabara said he was resigned to his fate.

"If they tell me I have to go, I have to go," he said through an interpreter. "My family is in Mexico, and I will not come back."

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