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Agents Arrest 29 Immigrants in New Haven

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW HAVEN, June 6 (AP) — Federal agents arrested 29 illegal immigrants in a raid on Wednesday, government officials said, two days after the city approved a program to make municipal identification cards available to illegal immigrants.

Paula Grenier, a spokeswoman for the Boston office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said the immigrants, who had already been ordered by judges to leave the country, were arrested in a routine fugitive operation and would be deported.

Kica Matos, who oversees the New Haven department that assists immigrants, said most of the arrests were in the city's Fair Haven section. Officials believe none of the immigrants have criminal records, she said.

Ms. Matos said she believed the raids were related to the Board of Aldermen's 25-1 vote on Monday to create all-purpose municipal identification cards to give immigrants better access to city services and to help the police confirm their identities should they become targets of crime.

Ms. Grenier said that was not the case. "These are routine fugitive operations," she said. "We have teams deployed all over the U.S."

But Mayor John DeStefano Jr. was dubious, saying, "There are in America 11,000 cities, towns and villages, but somehow, by some act of circumstance or coincidence, within 36 hours, the response was in New Haven."

Supporters say the ID program, believed to be the first of its kind in the nation, will help keep the city's roughly 15,000 illegal immigrants safe. They say that if they can open bank accounts, they will not need to carry large amounts of cash, which makes them robbery targets.

New Haven has been more welcoming to immigrants than many places, offering federal tax help and prohibiting the police from asking about their immigration status.