

**THE NEW YORK TIMES**

December 13, 2006

# Massachusetts Set for Its Officers to Enforce Immigration Law

By KATIE ZEZIMA

BOSTON, Dec. 12 — Gov. Mitt Romney will sign an agreement with the federal government Wednesday that gives the Massachusetts state police the authority to detain illegal immigrants and charge them with violating immigration law, his office said Tuesday.

The agreement will give 30 state troopers the power to interrogate people whom they determine, during the course of criminal investigations, to be illegal immigrants. The suspects can then be arrested without a warrant on the immigration charge alone. Illegal immigrants about to be released from state prison can also be detained.

Mr. Romney, a Republican who has been burnishing his conservative credentials as he considers running for president, announced earlier this year that he intended to enter the program. But although the agreement takes effect Wednesday, the officers do not begin five weeks of specialized training until next month, perhaps after he leaves office on Jan. 4.

And the governor's successor, Deval L. Patrick, a Democrat, has expressed doubts about the program, saying at a news conference last week that it was a "bad idea" to give troopers, who have "enough to do," the additional responsibility of enforcing immigration laws. Mr. Patrick's spokesman, Richard Chacon, said Tuesday that the governor-elect wanted to study the agreement before making a decision on whether to rescind it.

"He's not convinced that this is the right use of state police resources, and for that reason he thinks it's a bad idea," Mr. Chacon said. "His primary concern is for sound public policy, and he will base whatever his final decision is on that principle."

Eric Fehrstrom, a spokesman for Mr. Romney, said: "Governor Romney believes that empowering state police to detain immigration violators is an effective homeland security strategy. It's really another tool for law enforcement to use in their investigations into criminal activity or suspicious behavior."

Massachusetts would become the ninth jurisdiction to train its officers to enforce federal immigration law. Alabama and Florida have agreements with the federal government involving their state police, and Arizona has an agreement involving corrections officers. Counties in California and North Carolina are also participating in the program, which was created by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996.

"The goal of the partnership is to seek out those who both break our nation's immigration laws and the laws of Massachusetts by engaging in criminal activity," said Julie L. Myers, assistant homeland security secretary in charge of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement.

The agreement has angered local immigrant advocacy groups. Ali Noorani, executive director of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, said he hoped Mr. Patrick would rescind the accord, which, he maintains, is a waste of law enforcement's time and money.

"He is mismanaging public safety," Mr. Noorani said of Mr. Romney. "Unfortunately, on his way out the door he's taking one final punch at the most disenfranchised, powerless community we have."