

Conn. official faults US handling of immigrant

By MICHAEL MELIA, Associated Press

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HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — An adviser to Connecticut's governor said Thursday that the U.S. government's detention of a Mexican immigrant reveals flaws of the federal Secure Communities program, joining advocates at a rally condemning the initiative that took effect statewide earlier this year.

The immigrant, 34-year-old [Josemaria Islas](#) of New Haven, was arrested in July on charges that he tried to steal a bicycle. His lawyers said he was wrongfully arrested and the charges were later reduced to misdemeanors, but instead of being released, Islas was turned over to federal agents at the request of U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement.

[Mike Lawlor](#), the governor's top aide on criminal justice policy, said the case shows why the program that shares arrestee fingerprints with ICE could lead immigrant communities to lose trust in police officers.

"The bottom line is Mr. Islas is not a serious offender," Lawlor said at the rally outside the federal courthouse in Hartford. "If anything he is a poster child for why Secure Communities creates problems for local police departments."

ICE spokesman [Ross Feinstein](#) said Islas is a priority for removal from the country because he has broken immigration laws repeatedly. Biometric records show Islas was deported four times in August and September 2005, he said.

"As clearly stated in ICE's civil immigration enforcement priorities, illegal aliens who repeatedly violate immigration law are a priority for the agency," Feinstein said.

Islas' brother, [Francisco Paulino](#), disputed that Islas had been deported previously. He said Islas had never been arrested before he was picked up in Hamden on July 2.

Family members said a judge set bond Thursday for Islas, who is being held at a detention center in Massachusetts. They hope to have him released within days as he awaits the outcome of deportation proceedings.

Under Secure Communities, arrestee fingerprint information is checked against FBI criminal history records and biometrics-based immigration records kept by the [Homeland Security Department](#). If an irregularity is found, a "hold" is placed on a person, usually leading to deportation.

The program was activated in June 2010 in Fairfield County, and statewide in February. Feinstein said a total of 331 people have been deported from Connecticut under Secure Communities, including 201 convicted criminals, 41 ICE fugitives and 69 who were removed from the country previously.

Lawlor said he and Gov. [Dannel P. Malloy](#) are concerned that a number of non-serious offenders are being caught up in the program.

Earlier this year, the state [Department of Correction](#) implemented special protocols for the handling of ICE detention requests, saying they would only be granted in certain cases such as involving convicted felons. But Islas was turned over to federal agents by court marshals who report to the [Judicial Branch](#), which traditionally has honored all ICE requests.

Lawlor has been meeting with representatives of the Judicial Branch, the attorney general's office and the Correction of Department aimed at developing a uniform policy on ICE requests.

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