

Federal illegal immigration program expands in Md.

By [Dan Morse](#)

Federal immigration officials next week are set to start an illegal immigration enforcement program for Montgomery County and the city of Baltimore, making the “Secure Communities” initiative complete across Maryland. The program — which helps track fingerprints of arrestees who may be in the country illegally — has spread to [about 71 percent of jurisdictions nationwide](#).

Lots of local police officials like it, because they say it effectively keeps them out of the immigration enforcement business. Critics have said it can lead to deportations of people picked up for the most minor of offenses.

In a notice to officials in Montgomery and Baltimore this week, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) said Secure Communities will be deployed on Wednesday for those two jurisdictions. The notice stressed that jail officials won’t have to do anything differently. Indeed, in Montgomery County, correctional officers already send inmate fingerprints to a state collection system, according to Arthur Wallenstein, head of corrections in the county. Those prints are sent to the FBI, according to ICE. Under the Security Communities program, the fingerprints go one step farther — to federal immigration officials.

If immigration officials match the prints with the types of people they are targeting, they will move to have them detained and possibly deported. “ICE places a high priority on the removal of aliens convicted of crimes, recent illegal border crossers, immigration fugitives, and repeat immigration law violators,” the notice said.

An ICE spokesperson declined to confirm the Wednesday start date in Montgomery and Baltimore, but said in a statement: “ICE continues to work with its law enforcement partners in Montgomery and Baltimore City counties and across the country to responsibly and effectively implement this federal information sharing capability and plans to reach complete nationwide activation by the end of 2013.”

Patrick Lacefield, a spokesman for Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) said the Secure Communities notice from the federal government will compel the county to not do anything to impede the program. “We certainly don’t believe we have a choice in the matter,” he said.

Nancy Navarro, a Montgomery County Council member who has raised questions about Secure Communities in the past, said she will meet next week with Montgomery police and jail officials to make sure the program isn’t abused.

Navarro said both departments have worked hard to develop trust within the county's immigrant community, and she doesn't want to see it jeopardized. Federal officials appear to be making efforts not to use Secure Communities to deport people who have been in the U.S. a long time and get caught on minor charges, she said. "But the jury is still out on that," Navarro added.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/crime-scene/post/federal-illegal-immigration-program-expands-in-md/2012/02/16/gIQAJTusHR_blog.html