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Immigration agents to screen Arizona jail inmates

The Homeland Security Department says it will replace Maricopa County officers after revoking Sheriff Joe Arpaio's authority to access agency systems.

Associated Press

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Phoenix — The Homeland Security Department will use 50 immigration agents to screen jail inmates in Arizona's most populous county after revoking the sheriff's authority to access its systems, the agency said Monday in a letter to Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.).

The letter from Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Nelson Peacock, obtained by the Associated Press, says the 50 dedicated agents will "screen, identify, apprehend and remove criminal aliens" found in Maricopa County jails.

The agents will replace county officers who had special training and the authority to perform the task in Sheriff Joe Arpaio's lockups. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano revoked that authority last week after a Justice Department investigation concluded that Arpaio's office engaged in a pattern and practice of civil rights and constitutional violations and discriminated against Latinos.

Arpaio strongly disputed the Justice Department findings and said Monday that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents won't come close to replacing the 91 officers who had been doing the work. He said agents won't be in the jails and won't deport all illegal immigrants.

"They're going to have people answering telephones and deciding what levels they're going to deport," Arpaio said. "This is just to pacify the public that they aren't going to be released. And they are going to be released."

That's not the case, according to an ICE statement sent in response to Arpaio's comment that agents would not actually be in the jails.

"As was done previously, all individuals booked into the Maricopa County jail will be screened to determine if they are removable from the United States," the agency said. Those arrested for criminal offenses who are in the country illegally will be "removed from the United States in line with our priorities."

The government's report released last week found that Arpaio's office committed a wide range of civil rights violations against Latinos, including jail policies that deprive prisoners of basic

constitutional rights. It also found that his office failed to investigate sex crimes involving Latino victims.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-arizona-sheriff-20111220,0,7573562.story>