

Immigration Officials Suspend Enforcement Program in North Carolina County

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Charlotte, N.C. – U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has suspended the 287(g) program in a North Carolina county where the sheriff's office was cited by the Justice Department for discriminatory practices against Latinos.

The decision comes with the release of the results of the two-year investigation into the actions of the office of Alamance County Sheriff Terry S. Johnson, whose deputies have made a disproportionate number of unnecessary arrests of members of the local Hispanic community with an eye toward increasing the number of deportations of undocumented immigrants.

"The Department of Homeland Security is troubled by the Department of Justice's findings of discriminatory policing practices within the Alamance County Sheriff's Office," ICE spokeswoman Barbara Gonzalez said in a statement.

"Accordingly, and effective immediately, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is terminating ACSO's 287(g) jail model agreement and is restricting their access to the Secure Communities program," she said.

"ICE will continue to enforce federal immigration laws in Alamance County in smart, effective ways that focus our resources on criminal aliens, recent border crossers, repeat and egregious immigration law violators and employers who knowingly hire illegal labor," Gonzalez said.

This is the second time this year that ICE has suspended the enforcement of a 287(g) contract. The Obama administration in June cancelled the program's contract with all state and local police agencies in Arizona.

Sheriff Johnson, who has publicly disparaged the "moral values" of Mexicans, signed up for 287(g) in 2007.

Since the enforcement of 297(g) - which permits law enforcement personnel to determine the immigration status of people they detain - began in Alamance County, Latino leaders have complained that the officers have engaged in racial profiling.

Among the discriminatory practices that the Justice Department found in Alamance County were the setting up of checkpoints in Hispanic communities and a pronounced tendency to detain Latinos for offenses that would normally only warrant issuing a ticket.

Mary Rosenbluth, an attorney who has defended several Hispanics in immigration court after they were arrested in Alamance County for driving without a license, told Efe on Wednesday that at last "justice has come for the immigrants."

"What has happened is good, but there are still people in the process of deportation, and now ICE has to do its part, to cancel deportations according to its use of discretion, and give priority (in deportations) to criminals," Rosenbluth said.

The Justice Department conducted more than 125 interviews with county residents, employees and former employees in Johnson's office, which has until Sept. 30 to respond to the allegations and make changes or face legal action.

Read more: <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/politics/2012/09/20/immigration-officials-suspend-controversial-enforcement-program-in-north/>