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Los Angeles to Cease Transferring Some Immigrants

By IAN LOVETT

LOS ANGELES — The police in this city will soon stop turning over illegal immigrants arrested for low-level crimes to federal [immigration](#) officials for deportation, Police Chief Charlie Beck announced on Thursday.

At a news conference, Chief Beck said he hoped to put in place a set of protocols by the start of next year, under which the Los Angeles police will no longer honor requests from federal agencies to detain illegal immigrants who are arrested for nonviolent offenses like driving without a license, illegal vending or being drunk in public unless they were part of a street gang or had a criminal record.

The announcement was the biggest and potentially most controversial step yet for Chief Beck, who has been in his post since 2009, into the highly politicized waters of immigration enforcement. Under Secure Communities, a federal program that began in 2008, local law enforcement agencies share with federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials the fingerprints of everyone they arrest.

But Chief Beck said the program had impeded efforts to keep the city safe by eroding trust between the Police Department and the communities in Los Angeles.

“Community trust is extremely important to effective policing,” he said. “So it’s my intent, by issuing this change in procedures, that we gain this trust back.”

The new policy was welcomed by immigrant rights advocates, who were still stinging from Gov. Jerry Brown’s decision just a few days earlier to [veto a bill, known as the Trust Act](#), that would have prohibited local law enforcement officials from detaining illegal immigrants for deportation if they have not been charged with serious or violent crimes.

“This is more evidence that the Secure Communities program is incredibly flawed and, from our perspective, cruel,” said Angelica Salas, executive director of the [Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles](#).

In response to Mr. Beck’s announcement, officials from Immigration and Customs Enforcement reiterated that the agency had reformed its own policies in recent years to focus resources on “criminals, recent border crossers and repeat immigration law violators.”

“The federal government alone sets these priorities and places detainees on individuals arrested on criminal charges to ensure that dangerous criminal aliens and other priority individuals are not released from prisons and jails into our communities,” said Virginia Kice, a spokeswoman for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, in a prepared statement.

Chief Beck said the city attorney had told him that carrying out detention requests from federal immigration officials was not mandatory and that the decision to detain a suspect was still up to the Police Department.

But the Obama administration is [pushing back against officials in Cook County, Ill.](#), who last year adopted an ordinance that sharply limited local police cooperation with federal immigration agents.

Chief Beck said the department planned in the coming months to list the offenses for which illegal immigrants will not be detained. The police commission, a civilian board, must approve the policy.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/05/us/los-angeles-police-to-revise-immigrant-detention-policy.html>