

Immigration Reform: Obama Proposes Bed Mandate Reduction, Keeps Program That Deputizes Local And State Law Enforcement

By [Laura Matthews](#)

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Focusing on the quality of enforcement actions, the administration proposes a [\\$38.2 billion budget request](#) for the Department of Homeland Security. Within that is a \$2.6 billion allocation for the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to use to identify, detain and remove undocumented immigrants from the country.

Some \$131.6 million is to go towards the apprehension of immigrant fugitives in the country who are considered public safety risks. Another \$322.4 million will be used to remove those who are in federal, state and local prisons.

But the policy proposal that continues to anger some advocacy groups is the \$24 million funding to retain ICE's 287(g) program, which deputizes local and state law enforcement officials to take part in the immigration process.

Pablo Alvarado, executive director of the National Day Laborer Organizing network, said keeping programs like 287(g) is a waste of money.

"The president's budget belies his rhetoric on immigration, and it calls into question whether he is sincere about protecting immigrants and advancing immigration reform in the Congress," Alvarado said. "The administration cannot hide its own record behind Republican's extremism when it continues to propose funding for extremely cruel enforcement. The President must stop ratifying the premises of the nativists, and he must resolve the hypocrisy reflected in his budget."

But it wasn't all bad news for immigrants in Obama's 2015 budget. He took steps to reduce the controversial 34,000 per day immigration bed mandate to 30,539. DHS argued last year that [it could save money by cutting back](#) to about 31,000 beds under the \$2 billion a year detention program by looking to cheaper alternatives. Obama has proposed \$1.3 billion to fund the reduction as well as to supervise some 60,000 undocumented immigrants. Additionally, some \$94.1 million would go towards alternative programs that put low-risk undocumented immigrants under supervisions such as electronic monitoring.

Still, the amount of dollars being spent on the detention programs is worrying for experts who study the issue. New York University Professor Alina Das, who serves as co-director of the Immigrant Rights Clinic, said research has found that DHS often uses appropriations as a symbol of a mandate for its detention and deportation activities. She said it a mistake on the agency's part, but certainly one the administration can fix either through decreasing the allocated funds or by clarifying that those funds don't mean specific number of people must be detained.

“You are simply expanding the net of people who will end up being forced into the detention and deportation system,” Das said. “I worry that when you see these kinds of high numbers and allocations for what I view to be an arbitrary number of detention beds ... will result in continuingly high numbers of people who are being detained even though the smarter solution and the more humane solution would be to shift to alternatives to detention.”

Das would rather see a much higher amount of funds allocated to alternatives to detention. When asked if she thinks Obama, who deports about 1,100 people per day, is trying to send a message to his detractors that he is tough on immigration law breakers, Das said, “I don't think they will ever be satisfied so I hope the administration isn't using these numbers to satisfy them. The budget is really about good governance and making smart choices and giving people on the ground the flexibility to exercise discretion to make sure that we are not wasting billions of dollars locking people up and putting them in deportation proceedings when we are at the cusp of possible reform.”

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