

U.S. sets up hotline for detained immigrants

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(Reuters) - U.S. immigration authorities are setting up a telephone hotline to ensure that detainees held by local police forces partnering in a controversial federal immigration enforcement program are adequately informed of their rights.

The initiative announced by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency on Thursday provides a toll-free number to field queries from detainees held by state or local law enforcement agencies "if they believe they may be U.S. citizens or victims of a crime."

The hotline will be staffed 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week by ICE personnel at the Law Enforcement Support Center. Translation services will be available in several languages, ICE said in a news release.

"ICE personnel will collect information from the individual and refer it to the relevant ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Field Office for immediate action," it added.

Scores of state and local police forces partner with the U.S. federal government under the so-called 287 g program. It empowers participating agencies to enforce immigration law, although its implementation has been controversial.

Earlier this month, the Justice Department said a hard-line Arizona sheriff and his deputies violated U.S. civil rights laws by engaging in racial profiling of Latinos and making unlawful arrests in their bid to crack down on illegal immigrants.

In a separate move, U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano ended the 287 g agreement with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office that allowed its deputies to screen jail inmates for their immigration status.

As part of the initiative announced Thursday, ICE said a form will also be issued to all detainees -- with available translations in Spanish, French, Portuguese, Chinese and Vietnamese -- informing them that ICE will assume their custody within 48 hours.

"It also advises individuals that if ICE does not take them into custody within the 48 hours, they should contact the police agency or entity that is holding them to inquire about their release from state or local custody," it said.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/29/us-usa-immigration-hotline-idUSTRE7BS0ZG20111229>