



NEWS

From County Supervisor Paul Biane

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Biane: Counties Must Be Reimbursed for Jailing Criminal Illegal Aliens

SAN BERNARDINO – On Tuesday, the Board of Supervisors approved an application seeking about \$2 million from a threatened federal program that reimburses local governments for jailing illegal aliens who have been arrested for crimes.

The State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP) has been targeted for elimination in the budget proposed by the White House despite the fact that state and local governments spend billions of dollars annually to jail or imprison illegal aliens who are arrested or convicted of crimes.

“The burden of jailing illegal aliens who are caught committing crimes in our communities should not fall on the back of local government,” said Second District Supervisor Paul Biane, who led an earlier effort to identify criminal illegal aliens and to secure additional SCAAP funding for the County. “The burden should rest squarely on the federal government, which has failed in its duty to keep these criminals out of our country.”

In 2005, Supervisor Biane proposed the creation of an illegal immigrant screening program at West Valley Detention Center – the County’s largest criminal booking facility. He was concerned that United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers were not identifying all of the illegal immigrants booked into the facility because the agency did not have a full-time presence at the jail.

This presented two problems. First, some illegal immigrants were being released on bail or on their own recognizance because they were not being properly identified as illegal immigrants. These criminals often did not return to court to face charges. Second, by failing to document inmates who are not U.S. citizens, the County could not seek federal reimbursement for detaining them.

The County partnered with ICE to train Sheriff's custody specialists to check inmates' immigration status. Now, when an illegal immigrant is identified, a detainer is placed on the inmate to prevent him/her from being released on bail. The inmates get their day in court and must serve any sentence for their crimes. Inmates are turned over to ICE for deportation after their cases are resolved. In 2008, the program was expanded to County jails in Barstow, the Morongo Basin, Victorville, and San Bernardino using video conferencing technology.

"The County has taken many steps to ensure these criminals are identified, documented, and deported, and I'm hopeful Congress will see the wisdom in fully funding SCAAP so local governments like San Bernardino County can continue to play a vital role in the efforts to fight illegal immigration," Biane said.

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