

NEWS



From County Supervisor Paul Biane

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Supervisors Renew Immigration Screening Program

SAN BERNARDINO – The County of San Bernardino will continue to partner with the federal immigration authorities to identify illegal immigrants booked into County jails on criminal charges so they can be deported to their home countries after serving their sentences, the Board of Supervisors decided Tuesday.

Supervisors approved a three-year agreement with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to continue the screening program, which was implemented in 2005 after a request by Second District Supervisor Paul Biane.

Biane asked the Sheriff's Department to develop a criminal illegal alien screening program after receiving reports that about 15% of criminals booked into County jails were in the country illegally and that their incarceration was costing the Sheriff's Department about \$12 million annually. In addition, the Sheriff's Department reported that many illegal immigrants arrested and later released on bail or on their own recognizance did not appear in court to answer the charges against them.

Under the program, Sheriff's custody specialists trained by ICE screen inmates booked into County jails to determine their immigration status. The Sheriff's Department places a hold on inmates identified as illegal aliens so they cannot be released from jail. Once the inmates' cases are resolved, they must serve their jail or prison sentence. Afterward, the inmates are turned over to ICE for deportation. Deported inmates face time in federal prison if they are caught in the country illegally again.

"This program allows the Sheriff's Department to identify illegal immigrants when they are booked into a County jail for a crime so they don't end up back on our streets," Biane said. "It does not authorize deputies to randomly target or arrest undocumented immigrants, and it

should not deter anyone from reporting a crime or providing witness information to the authorities.”

So far this year, the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department has placed immigration holds on 2,742 inmates. In 2008, the Sheriff’s Department identified 2,359 illegal aliens booked into County jails.

Besides ensuring that criminal illegal aliens are identified and held at County jails, the screening program also helps the Sheriff’s Department track the number of illegal immigrants booked into its jails so the County can seek reimbursement from the federal government through the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP). The Sheriff’s Department received \$2.2 million from SCAAP for the previous fiscal year. The actual cost of detaining illegal immigrant inmates, however, was \$15.8 million.

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