



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on January 17, 2011

ICE's Secure Communities are Spreading

Wisconsin joined 36 other states in participating in the U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement (ICE) program called "secure communities." Likewise, New York's Putnam and Rockland Counties became the first of New York's counties to join the program this week.

According to the *Journal Sentinel*, the program involves a "federal information sharing system that uses biometrics, or fingerprints, to identify both legal and illegal immigrants booked on criminal charges."



[ICE](#) explains of the program:

Through the Secure Communities strategy, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) improves public safety every day by transforming the way criminal aliens are identified and removed from the United States. This strategy leverages an existing information sharing capability between the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to quickly and accurately identify aliens who are arrested for a crime and booked into local law enforcement custody. With this capability, the fingerprints of everyone arrested and booked are not only checked against FBI criminal history records, but they are also checked against DHS immigration records. If fingerprints match DHS records, ICE determines if immigration enforcement action is required, considering the immigration status of the alien, the severity of the crime and the alien's criminal history. Secure Communities also helps ICE maximize and prioritize its resources to ensure that the right people, processes and infrastructure are in place to accommodate the increased number of criminal aliens being identified and removed.

In other words, the new program allows for enhanced information sharing between agencies that in the past have worked separately from one another. The program engages the use of fingerprint-based biometric technology, and prioritizes the agency's resources by determining the greatest threats.

ICE spokesperson Gail Montenegro explains, "In the past fingerprints taken of individuals charged with a crime and booked into custody were checked for criminal history information against the Department of Justice's Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System."

There are currently 969 jurisdictions involved in the program, including New York's Putnam and Rockland Counties. Wisconsin entered an agreement with ICE to participate in the program this week, but ICE projects that the program will be nationwide by 2013.

ICE boasts a great deal of success with the program. In [California](#), for example, over 460 criminal aliens have been removed as a result of the program. The [DHS News Wire](#) reports that the secure communities program has resulted in the deportation of tens of thousands of illegal aliens, "From October 2008 through June 2010, 46,929 people identified through Secure Communities were removed from the U.S. ; of those, 12,293 were considered non-criminals."

Despite the touted success of the new program, to some, it is too controversial. Christine Neumann-



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Ortiz, executive director of Voces de la Frontera, contends that the program “casts too wide a net, abusing due process rights so that someone who is innocent of a charge will still end up in deportation proceedings.”

She also asserts that the program will encourage racial profiling and undermine public trust by preventing illegal alien victims and witnesses to report crimes.

Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke disputes such claims.

“Right now immigration is a very passionate and emotional issue and that’s replaced reason and logic when it comes to the enforcement of immigration policy.”

He adds, “We don’t enforce immigration at the local level. It’s a federal issue. But as sheriff we do have a role in sharing information with any legitimate law enforcement agency for lawful purposes.”

Likewise, Brown County Sheriff John Gossage states, “Enhanced information sharing and increased communications with ICE will greatly aid in our effort to identify, apprehend, and reduce the number of criminal illegal aliens in Brown County.”

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