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# Deal to Share Fingerprints Is Dropped, Not Program

By KIRK SEMPLE and JULIA PRESTON

Federal [immigration](#) officials announced Friday that they were terminating the joint agreements with state and local governments that have been at the center of a controversy surrounding a national fingerprint-sharing program, although they said they would continue setting up the program unilaterally.

In a letter to 40 governors and local officials who had signed the agreements, [John Morton](#), the director of [Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#), said the change was intended to eliminate widespread confusion, which has plagued the program since its kickoff in 2008, over whether the agreements were necessary to initiate it. The move also seemed intended to remove political pressure from local officials who felt uneasy about appearing to collaborate with federal authorities on immigration enforcement.

The decision was met with a chorus of angry criticism from immigrant groups. More than 200 immigrant advocacy groups recently signed a letter demanding that the Obama administration suspend the program until changes are made to ensure that illegal immigrants who are not criminals are not deported. But Friday's move made clear that the administration had no intention of suspending or even slowing the pace of the program.

The agreements, called memorandums of agreement, laid out the guidelines for setting up the program, known as **Secure Communities**, which is being rolled out across the country and is scheduled to be in effect nationwide by 2013.

Under the program, a cornerstone of the Obama administration's enforcement strategy, the fingerprints of everyone booked into a local or county jail are automatically sent to the Department of Homeland Security and compared with prints in the agency's files, which record immigration violations.

Immigration officials insist that the program is intended to identify and deport the most serious noncitizen criminals as well as those who threaten national security. But critics have argued that the program has resulted in the deportations of a disproportionate number of foreigners guilty only of low-level offenses, like traffic infractions, or immigration violations.

This year, the governors of Illinois, New York and Massachusetts, in the belief that Secure Communities was voluntary, announced they were suspending or canceling their participation in the program.

But since at least last fall, federal officials have insisted that the program was never voluntary and could be carried out across the country without the consent of local or state officials.

In a letter to Gov. Jack Markell of Delaware on Friday, Mr. Morton said that his agency was canceling the agreements because it had determined that they were "not required to activate or operate Secure Communities."

"We are going to bring to an end any questions about whether or not we are requiring any state involvement in immigration enforcement," a senior official from Immigration and Customs Enforcement said in an interview on Friday.

Obama administration officials have explained that as long as local jurisdictions continue to share

fingerprints with the F.B.I. — a routine procedure — then the fingerprints will automatically flow into a general federal database accessible to Homeland Security Department officials.



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