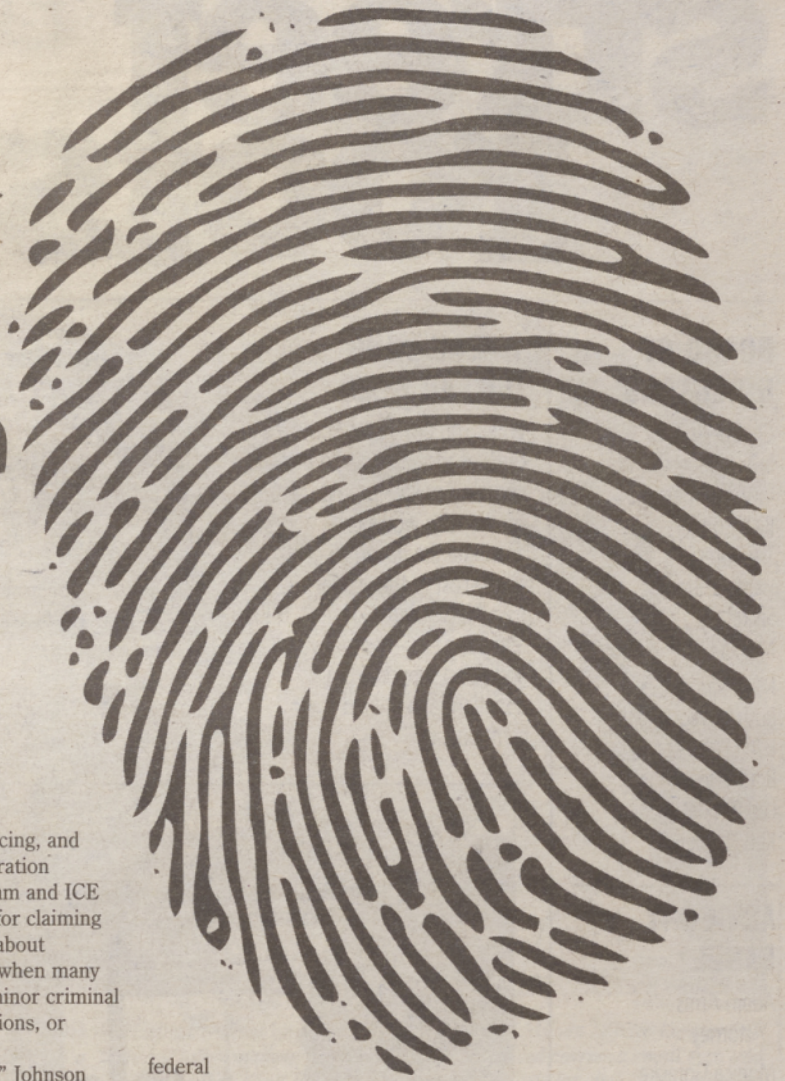


Under their thumbs



BY JOANNE ZUHL
STAFF WRITER

How Immigration and Customs Enforcement has co-opted local law enforcement to find their targets for them

It was the unusual number of calls that led the Portland Human Rights Commission to check out Secure Communities. The calls were coming from members of the immigrant community who were concerned about the increase in deportations, and asking for help for family members who had been stopped by police and ended up being deported, said Maria Lisa Johnson, director of the Portland Human Rights Commission.

The calls initiated research by the Human Rights Commission on the local police involvement with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE. This past spring, the commission began a process involving the Portland Police Bureau, the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, the American Civil Liberties Union, and an array of immigrant and cultural organizations, all to determine how local police interact

with the federal immigration agents. The commission released its report in December.

Secure Communities, or S-Comm, as its critics call it, is an information-sharing program of ICE that collects fingerprint information from immigrants arrested and held in local jails, regardless of charges or convictions. The fingerprints are then entered into the Department of Homeland Security databases. If there is a match and the person is identified as illegally in the United States, ICE can request that the local jailer detain that person for up to 48 hours while it considers enforcement action, including deportation.

In the mere 10 months it's been enforced in the Portland metro area, the program has drummed up a host of human rights concerns, including fostering a bias against immigrants,

undermining community policing, and turning local jails into immigration extension offices. The program and ICE are also criticized nationally for claiming that Secure Communities is about deporting serious criminals, when many of those deported had only minor criminal records, such as traffic violations, or none at all.

"There is an absolute fear," Johnson said. "As an undocumented individual whose family relies on your income to be able to succeed, then you're pulled out of that community. That's a huge fear and risk."

"Our biggest concern is that when someone is arrested and booked, they have not yet been convicted but they're being caught up in the immigration system immediately, and often they disappear, in most cases up to Tacoma," says Andrea Meyer, Legislative Director of the ACLU Oregon, referring to ICE's detention and removal center in Washington. "We are talking about people who may have extremely low-level crimes, or are not guilty of anything. The result is to create significant fear in the community about safe interaction with the police in general."

Meanwhile, the South Portland Neighborhood Association is appealing the city process that has allowed ICE to relocate its detention facilities to a 65,000-square-foot project among the South Waterfront high-rises on Macadam Avenue.

Business is booming. In fiscal year 2010, which ended in October, ICE set a record for overall removals of illegal immigrants — more than 392,000 nationwide. Half of those removed, more than 195,000, were convicted criminals, according to ICE. The fiscal year 2010 statistics represent increases of more than 23,000 removals overall and 81,000 criminal removals compared with fiscal year 2008, due in part because of Secure Communities.

This month, Oregon State Rep. Kim Thatcher (R-Keizer), introduced a package of bills to further overlap local police responsibilities with enforcement of

federal immigration laws, and to restrict government services to only those citizens who can prove legal status. The package includes limiting driver's licenses and voting rights to only legal citizens, measures that failed to pass in 2009.

Secure Communities is active in 969 jurisdictions in 37 states including California and Idaho, where state police signed agreements to deliver fingerprints to ICE. In Oregon, four counties are "activated," on the system through the agreement between ICE and the Oregon State Police. Clackamas County was the first to be activated in April 2010, followed by Marion, Multnomah and Washington counties. Since April, ICE reports 381 convicted "criminal aliens" arrested or booked into ICE custody through those four counties in the program. Nearly 40 percent of them, or 142 people, were deported.

The Department of Homeland Security says it intends to have the program activated in all states and jurisdictions by 2013.

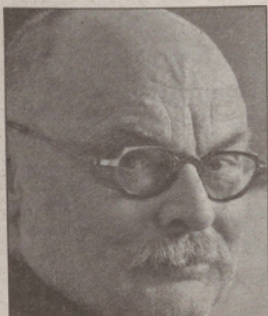
In fact, when it comes to signing on to the program, there is some confusion as to whether local agencies really have any choice in the matter. Early in the program, ICE said local jurisdictions could opt out, but more recently it said they could not.

"We've heard mixed signals from DHS: First 'yes, you could' and then 'no, you can't,'" said Andrea Meyer. "We



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