

Sheriff rejects illegal-immigrant holding plan

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Marion County Sheriff Russ Isham has turned down a proposal from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to use the county jail as a regional holding place for suspected criminal illegal immigrants.

The deal would have meant an influx of federal money for Marion County.

The sheriff's decision has drawn fire from groups and people opposed to illegal immigration.

"I don't understand that," said Jim Ludwick, president of the anti-illegal-immigration group, Oregonians for Immigration Reform.

"It's costing taxpayers in Marion County about \$2.3 million per year to incarcerate about 80 illegal aliens," he said. "It would seem to me that anything that can be done to mitigate that would certainly be of benefit to the people of the county."

Isham said the county already has enough of its own criminals and doesn't need to handle anyone else's at the 528-bed facility.

Before making his decision, the sheriff sought feedback from various groups in the community, including people who support immigrants and people who are against illegal immigration.

In the end, he decided against the deal because of "concerns I had about how the partnership with ICE would affect the relationships my office has worked so hard to develop with minority groups in Marion County," Isham told the Statesman Journal. "But I admit, the money was appealing."

ICE told sheriff officials they likely would house eight to 10 detainees at the jail at any given time from other jurisdictions, until they could be transported to the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Wash.

At \$74.07 per day for each detainee, Marion County would have seen \$600 to more than \$700 per day in federal funds for housing detainees from other jurisdictions.

The deal also would have paid for foreign-born criminals in custody at the jail on local charges.

Through the federal government's State Criminal Alien Assistance Program, or SCAAP, state and local governments can ask to be reimbursed for housing criminals held on local charges



Lori Cain | Statesman Journal file

Marion County jail was asked to house an additional eight to 10 inmates in a role as a regional holding center for the ICE. Sheriff Russ Isham has rejected the proposal.

About CAP

The federal Criminal Alien Program, or CAP, focuses on identifying criminal illegal immigrants incarcerated within federal, state and local facilities.

Those identified typically remain in custody so they can complete their sentences before they are handed over to ICE for removal proceedings.

The purpose of the program is to ensure undocumented criminals are not released into the community, by securing a final order of removal prior to the termination of their sentence.

SOURCE: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

and who have had ICE holds placed on them, said Raul Ramirez, executive director of the Oregon State Sheriff's Association and former Marion County sheriff.

But federal reimbursement often comes up short, he said.

"Sometimes, it doesn't really generate money," said Raul Ramirez.

The ICE request also would have meant making available office space or a working area at the jail for at least one ICE employee, the sheriff said.

It also could have forced the jail to become overcrowded and release local offenders to make room for ICE detainees, said Sheriff's Department spokeswoman Lt. Sheila Lorange.

Had the sheriff approved the deal, it would have driven people in the immigrant community, perhaps even legal immigrants, further into the shadows, said **Barbara Ghio**, an immigration attorney with the **Law Offices of Muntz & Ghio in Salem**.

"It would have caused immigrants to not visit their loved ones in jail, not show up to testify in court for fear of being taken into custody by ICE and not report when they've been victimized," said **Ghio**, a native of Argentina who became a U.S. citizen in 2006.

At least two-thirds of ICE detainees are held in state and local jails, according to ICE spokeswoman Lori Dankers.

The federal agency regularly places officers in jails to conduct interviews with foreign-born inmates in support of the Criminal Alien Program, or CAP, she said.

Currently, more than 50 jails in Oregon participate in the program, she said, adding that the offer extended to Marion County was not part of that program.

She confirmed that Isham had declined the agency's offer to house detainees in his jail.

"We were looking to see if there was space available at the Marion County jail that would help us meet both short-term and long-term detention needs," Dankers said. "It's not something we tried to coerce. We still have a working relationship with Marion County, with our ultimate goal being public safety."

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