

## NASHVILLE SHERIFF DROPS IMMIGRATION PROGRAM

TRAVIS LOLLER - Associated Press (AP)  
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Nashville Sheriff Daron Hall said on Tuesday that he will not renew a controversial agreement that allows local deputies to enforce federal immigration law, replacing it with a program in which the fingerprints of detainees are sent electronically to federal agents who can check immigration status.

In April 2007, Davidson County became one of the first communities to enroll in the 287(g) program. Hall applied to participate in 2006, after an illegal immigrant killed two people while driving drunk. The case became a campaign issue during the gubernatorial race when it was revealed that the man had been arrested at least 14 times.

"The community was blaming me for letting people go who were illegally in the country," Hall said during a Tuesday news conference, explaining that at the time he had no way of knowing the immigration status of inmates.

Immigrant rights activists initially hoped the 287(g) program would target only violent criminals for deportation, but it quickly became a point of controversy when it started ensnaring many people for misdemeanors, such as driving without a license. Activists also charged that the program encouraged racial profiling and led to mistrust between illegal immigrants and police.

One of those caught by the program was Mercedes Gonzalez, a teenager arrested last year, one week before her high school graduation, for speeding and driving without a license. Federal officials agreed not to deport her after other students and concerned citizens rallied to her cause.

Gonzalez, who is now 19 and was brought to the U.S. by her parents at age 11, attended Hall's announcement on Tuesday. She said she was glad 287(g) will end but concerned that the new program, Secure Communities, will continue to place people in deportation for minor offenses.

"I'm actually still terrified about the police," Gonzalez said.

Hall painted a different picture of the program.

"I believe its success is the reason we can sit here today and say it is no longer needed," he said.

Since 2007, there has been an 80 percent decrease in the number of arrestees in Nashville who are illegally in the country, Hall said. He attributed much of the decline to the program, although he said he could not be sure how much of it was due to the overall nationwide decline in illegal immigration in recent years.

Hall's participation in 287(g) is currently the subject of a federal lawsuit that claims the sheriff's department is exceeding the authority given to it by Metro Nashville's charter. When Davidson County formed a metropolitan government 50 years ago, all law enforcement duties were given to the police department while the sheriff's office was left the responsibility of running the jail.

The suit only targets 287(g) but it has shone a light on other sheriff's department activities that might not be specifically authorized by the charter, such as serving warrants on people in the jail. Because of this, Metro's Law Department is proposing a charter amendment that would clarify the expanded duties of the sheriff's department. The move has widely

been seen as a response to the 287(g) lawsuit.

On Tuesday, Hall said the charter amendment is completely separate and will move forward despite the department dropping out of the 287(g) program. Although the current agreement with the federal government does not expire until October, Hall said he decided to go ahead and make the announcement that it would not be renewed.

"We did not want the future of 287(g) to detract from the charter amendment," Hall said.



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