

Leggett says he plans to fight feds over illegal-immigration program

By: [Hayley Peterson](#) 04/26/11 8:05 PM

County exec says he will explore legal options over Secure Communities

Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett says he would pursue legal action against the Obama administration if the federal government forces Montgomery to implement a deportation program for violent illegal immigrants.

The federal government is requiring all local jurisdictions to comply with the Secure Communities program by 2013, with Montgomery joining as soon as September, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

The program requires local detention centers to send inmates' fingerprints to a national database that helps federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement identify and deport illegal immigrants.

"I'm opposed to it," Leggett told The Washington Examiner on Tuesday. "The problem for us now -- the challenge is -- what kind of legal authority we have if they decide that's what they want to do."

Leggett said ICE has not contacted his office regarding a deadline for implementation. If the agency does, he will begin exploring legal options to fight the program, such as an appeal, "if one is available," he said.

"I just don't think what the federal government is doing is in our best interest," he said, defending the county's current system for identifying violent illegals.

Montgomery County currently forwards the names of inmates who are convicted of violent crimes to the Department of Homeland Security.

ICE spokesman Ross Feinstein said he would not comment on the county's ability to legally challenge Secure Communities.

Expanding that list to include all detainees could have a chilling effect on illegal immigrants who are victims of crime by discouraging them from calling the police for help, Montgomery County Councilman George Leventhal said.

"We need to shine a light on the problems posed by this Secure Communities program," said Leventhal, D-at large. "We need the Obama administration to pay attention. This program needs to be rethought."

Councilwoman Nancy Navarro, D-eastern county, introduced a resolution Tuesday that opposes the implementation of Secure Communities in Montgomery. Leventhal, Councilman Hans Riemer, D-at large, and Council President Valerie Ervin, D-Silver Spring, co-sponsored the measure.

"For this county, who is the home of half of all Latino residents in the state of Maryland and home to many other immigrants -- I think it sets a very, very negative signal that we would welcome, with our open arms, such a program," Navarro said at a rally of about a dozen Hispanic activists outside the County Council building in Rockville. "This morning the council has sent a signal -- has sent a message -- that says we do not want this program here."

However, Montgomery's effort to opt out of the program likely will fail, based on Arlington County's experience trying to withdraw from the program last year.

Arlington officials resolved to comply after ICE agents gave them no other option.

"ICE stated clearly -- and with finality -- that local activated communities do not have the option of withholding information from the program, although communities can opt not to learn the results of immigration queries," Arlington County Manager Barbara M. Donnellan wrote in a memo to the County Board.