

EXITING GOV TWEAKS LAW FOR IMMIGS

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Body

IN HIS NEXT to last day in office, **Gov.** Paterson made changes to the state's plan to join a controversial program that sends fingerprints of anyone arrested to immigration officials.

The governor insisted the new agreement more clearly spells out that convicted felons and terrorists are the targets of the program.

But immigration advocates, who wanted him to rescind the state's agreement with Immigration and Customs Enforcement completely, said the changes were largely rhetorical.

"There's no real change in the program itself - it's just wording," said Andres Garcia of New Immigrant Community Empowerment. Garcia says the program, called Secure Communities, will make immigrants in the city afraid to go to the police.

Garcia and other advocates say statistics show that a majority of those deported from places where Secure Communities is already up and running had no criminal records or were picked up for low-level offenses.

Advocates also worry the program could end up deporting domestic violence victims who are sometimes booked by cops after a dispute.

Secure Communities - slated to begin in Rockland and Putnam counties on Jan. 11 - is being rolled out across the country amid confusion over whether counties can opt out.

Paterson said yesterday only communities that specifically agree to share information with the feds will be enrolled.

It's unclear who in New York City would have the ability to sign on, and what the process would be. ICE officials, who have maintained that the program is mandatory, didn't return a call for comment. epearson@nydailynews.com

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