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Protesters target immigration program

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A crowd of about 60 men and women marched, chanted and carried signs Monday to protest the implementation of a federal immigration program opponents say would be expensive, sow fear in the immigrant community and lead to widespread abuse.

Immigrants rights advocates and day laborers gathered at the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office to protest Sheriff Kim Guadagno's application for the federal 287(g) program, which deputizes local law enforcement officers as federal immigration agents.

Guadagno wants to train officers in the county jail to check inmates' immigration status. Federal immigration officers already perform prisoner checks for the county jail, but not on an everyday basis, running the risk that some inmates could bail out before officials verify their status. Having trained officers on hand would speed up the process, Guadagno said.

"(The program) will help us guarantee that a criminal is not released," Guadagno said after the rally.

The program would not extend to officers performing duties like patrols, she said.

But protesters feared that the implementation of 287(g) — and the civil rights abuses they believe follow — would not stop at the jail.

"To me, it's like opening the door," Casa Freehold coordinator Rita Dentino said.

Critics said Monday that the time necessary for training officers would be "extensive" and costly. The program would also cause fear in immigrant communities, preventing some people from reporting crimes out of concern they would be asked about their immigration status.

"Let the federal government deal with it (immigration checks)," said the executive director of the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network, Charles "Shai" Goldstein.

Guadagno, who did not attend the rally, defended her position.

The training will last five weeks and involve three officers already assigned to perform criminal checks. The estimated cost will be \$50,000, she said.

"I don't know how you can put a price tag on the lives on Monmouth County residents," Guadagno said.

The sheriff has previously said that she expects the costs to be recouped if officials identify undocumented inmates. The county is reimbursed \$105 per day for every federal prisoner it houses, she has said.

As for the possibility of intimidation, Guadagno emphasized that the program would be run only in the jail. Rather than preventing residents from reporting crimes, she said some members of the immigrant community support the idea of keeping criminals off the street.

Monday's demonstration was coordinated by the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, but representatives from several local groups — including Casa Freehold, the Latino Leadership Alliance of New Jersey, New Labor and Jornaleros Unidos de Freehold — also participated. Members of the American Friends Service Committee, Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center and Jornaleros de Passaic also attended.

After Monday's protest, the National Day Laborer Organizing Network plans to continue its involvement in the fight against Guadagno's 287(g) plans, according to the network's East Coast region organizer, Sarahi Uribe.

Monday's event was part of a national day of protest meant to bring attention to the 287(g) program run by Sheriff Joe Arpaio in Maricopa County, Ariz., which organizing network representatives say has resulted in "severe" civil rights abuses. Protests were planned in 15 to 20 cities, according to Uribe.
