

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
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U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Field Office Directors and
All Fugitive Operation Team Members

FROM: John Morton
Assistant Secretary 

SUBJECT: National Fugitive Operations Program: Priorities, Goals, and
Expectations

Purpose

This memorandum serves to clarify the enforcement priorities of the National Fugitive Operations Program (hereinafter the program) within the Office of Detention and Removal Operations (DRO) and supersedes previously issued fugitive operations guidance. The existence and continuation of this program are essential to the integrity of the immigration and border controls. Good government is poorly served if, after much time and the expenditure of government resources, final orders of removal are ignored without consequence. Indeed, the sound administration of the nation's immigration system depends on an efficient, fair, and meaningful removal process. As a result, it is the clear policy of this agency that final orders of removal should be enforced and that those who knowingly disobey or evade a final order of removal should be apprehended and removed.

In order to ensure that the program's resources are used efficiently and as envisioned by Congress, it is the policy of this agency that the program focus on its core mission—the apprehension and removal of fugitive aliens.¹ In the interest of public safety and the rule of law, the program's resources may also be used to apprehend and remove (1) aliens who have been removed previously from the United States and then return illegally, and (2) criminal or otherwise dangerous aliens living at large in our communities. As a general rule, the program's resources should not be used to target other classes of removable aliens, although fugitive operations teams may apprehend and remove such aliens if encountered during normal operations.

¹ A fugitive is any alien who has failed to leave the United States following the issuance of a final order of removal, deportation, or exclusion or has failed to report to ICE after receiving notice to do so.

Enforcement Priorities

The following three tiers reflect, in order of priority, how fugitive operations teams should focus their resources. Teams must focus the vast majority of resources, at least 70%, on tier 1 fugitives. The remainder should be directed to tiers 2 and 3. The priorities within each tier are also listed below, with level I generally warranting more attention than level II, and so forth. These tiers and levels provide clear guidance to the field but should not be applied so rigidly as to undermine sound judgment when exceptions are warranted by circumstance.² Similarly, the tiers should not be so rigidly interpreted to prevent prioritizing an illegal reentrant with a serious criminal conviction over a fugitive with no criminal history.

Tier 1 Fugitive aliens

- I. Fugitives who pose a threat to national security
- II. Fugitives convicted of violent crimes or who otherwise pose a threat to the community
- III. Fugitives with a criminal conviction other than a violent crime
- IV. Fugitives with no criminal conviction

Tier 2 Previously removed aliens

- I. Previously removed aliens who pose a threat to national security
- II. Previously removed aliens convicted of violent crimes or who otherwise pose a threat to the community
- III. Previously removed aliens with a criminal conviction other than a violent crime
- IV. Previously removed aliens with no criminal conviction

Tier 3 Removable aliens convicted of crimes

- I. Aliens convicted of level 1 offenses, as defined for purpose of Secure Communities
- II. Aliens convicted of level 2 offenses, as defined for purposes of Secure Communities
- III. Aliens convicted of level 3 offenses, as defined for purposes of Secure Communities

With respect to non-criminal fugitive targets in Tier 1, level IV, the Fugitive Operations Support Center (FOSC) and teams should consider that aliens who are the subject of in absentia orders and aliens with pending applications for relief before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services are more likely to have viable motions to reopen. For that reason, resources—particularly detention resources—may be better focused on other targets, unless aggravating circumstances offset the possibility of reopening or prolonged proceedings.

To promote efficiency, teams are expected to focus resources on cases with the most current investigative leads, including cases with the most recently issued final orders as these are most

² These guidelines and priorities are not intended to, do not, and may not be relied upon to create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law by any party in any administrative, civil, or criminal matter.

likely to contain up-to-date contact information. These should be targeted as soon as possible to limit the opportunity for a fugitive to relocate. Teams are expected to act expeditiously if they receive current, time-sensitive leads.

As resources are best spent on cases with the freshest and most reliable leads, FOSC has created a cold case docket for those cases without any investigative leads in the past decade. FOSC will review the cold case docket twice a year to determine if new information has surfaced. New information may cause FOSC to conclude the case is resolved (for instance, because the case was reopened) or return it to the active fugitive docket (for instance, because of new information about the alien's location).

Teams will receive Fourth Amendment training every six months which will focus on the special considerations when apprehending fugitives at their home. Any team member with questions should consult his or her supervisors and consult with the Office of Chief Counsel. Team members are encouraged to engage in surveillance both to promote officer safety and increase the likelihood the team will encounter the targeted alien—rather than aliens who are not in the tiers above and would not otherwise have been the focus of limited government resources.

If during the course of operations teams encounter removable aliens, teams may place those aliens into removal proceedings, even if they are not in one of the three tiers. However, this should not detract attention away from the reason Congress mandated and funded fugitive operation teams—the apprehension and removal of fugitive aliens. In any event, detention resources shall be focused on aliens in the three tiers above and aliens subject to mandatory detention by law. Absent extraordinary circumstances, team members should not detain aliens who are physically or mentally ill, disabled, elderly, pregnant, nursing, or the sole caretaker(s) of children or the infirm. To detain aliens in those categories, team members must secure approval from the Field Office Director and send a significant event notice (SEN) to headquarters.

Measuring Success

As apprehending and removing fugitives is the program's core mission, field offices' performance will be measured in part by the reduction in the fugitive docket and by compliance with priorities. Each field office and the FOSC should strive to reduce the pool of fugitives by 5% more in FY 2010 than it did in FY 2009. A field office may increase productivity—the reduction in the fugitive pool—by apprehending fugitives or otherwise resolving fugitive cases, even if no arrest is involved. This includes resolving cases by determining that a target has departed the country on his or her own or determining that the case was reopened or the target has since received an immigration benefit. Field offices should not feel such pressure to meet this goal that they lose focus on the priorities and sound use of resources. This goal does not constitute a quota; rather, this goal allows the teams to gage their productivity.

The field should not focus on numbers to the detriment of targeting and arresting the most egregious, violent offenders in their area of responsibility (AOR). To acknowledge the tiered prioritization above, DRO also will track fugitive arrests, by tier, using EARM/FCMS/TECS. Arrests will be separated by tiers, criminal and non-criminal arrests, and indictments and

convictions attributed to teams during operations. This system will credit teams for locating high priority aliens, even if those cases require more time to investigate and close.

Field offices are expected to focus not simply on the apprehension of aliens, but also on their removal. Headquarters will evaluate removals in addition to the metrics above. When fugitives are taken into custody, officers should pay attention to lawful avenues to secure the person's travel documents to reduce detention times and facilitate removal.

Field and National Operations

Field offices have the discretion to conduct operations to advance the program's priorities and accomplish the goal of reducing the fugitive pool. Field offices are encouraged to participate in Operation Cross Check and Operation Secure Streets in collaboration with local United States Attorney's offices. These operations are important as they identify criminal aliens who fall within the three tiers above. Field offices also will be called on to participate in national and strategic headquarters-driven operations. Major operations, whether driven by the field or headquarters, will be coordinated with the Office of the Principal Legal Advisor.

Building Partnerships

Field Office Directors and team members are encouraged to maintain and build positive relationships with federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies in their AOR. This includes information sharing, consistent with law and policy. Team members are encouraged to advise, and cooperate with, local law enforcement partners when conducting operations. Field Office Directors will coordinate with any local participants in the task force model of the 287(g) program to share information and avoid duplication of efforts.

Field Office Directors also are expected to build relationships with community groups to identify and address concerns about the conduct of fugitive operations. Allegations of misconduct and wrongdoing are referable to the Joint Intake Center (JIC).