

COOPER PUSHES FOR INSTALLATION OF A FEDERAL IMMIGRATION JUDGE IN NASHVILLE

Immigration enforcement program that Cooper helped secure is producing thousands of cases that a judge should hear locally

NASHVILLE-Congressman Jim Cooper on Monday announced that he has partnered with Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) to push for a much-needed federal immigration judge to preside in Nashville. The new judge would begin hearing locally the thousands of new immigration violation cases that have come as a result of Nashville's implementation of a program allowing local law enforcement personnel to serve as deputized federal immigration officials.

Cooper and Alexander made the announcement at a Monday morning press conference coinciding with the one-year anniversary of the Davidson County Sheriff's Office's participation in the immigration enforcement program, known as 287(g) for the section of the 1996 law that created it.

The 287(g) program allows local law enforcement personnel - in this case members of the Sheriff's Office who book all persons arrested in Nashville into jail - to run instant immigration checks on suspected illegal immigrants and non-resident aliens. In the first year the program has been on line in Nashville, specially-trained Sheriff's Deputies have identified nearly 3,000 persons as illegal immigrants.

"What this is all about is law enforcement, criminal law enforcement," said Cooper, who was instrumental in having Nashville's 287(g) application approved by the Department of Homeland Security. "What we're trying to do here is clean up the nation's immigration mess, and we're starting right here in our community."

The tremendous volume of immigration cases now arising in Nashville has prompted Cooper to call on DHS to take the next step. Nashville is one of only a handful of communities across the country taking a proactive roll in enforcing our federal immigration laws, and sitting an immigration judge in the community will help strengthen law enforcement efforts and save taxpayers dollars.

"Currently, all persons processed under 287(g) must report to Memphis or Oakdale, Louisiana, for an immigration hearing. They are transported to Memphis or Oakdale at considerable cost and at considerable time burdens. Installing an immigration judge in Nashville would ease these additional costs," Cooper and Alexander wrote to DHS Assistant Secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement Julie Myers on March 6, 2008.

"We were able to cut through some of Washington D.C.'s red tape in getting 287(g) up and running in Nashville," Cooper said. "But we've got more cutting to do. It makes absolutely no sense at all to have our local law enforcement agencies initiating thousands of federal immigration cases every year only to have local taxpayers pay to transport those thousands of individuals across the state or to Louisiana for their court hearings."

Along with Cooper and Alexander, Davidson County Sheriff Daron Hall, Nashville Chief of Police Ronal Serpas, and Nashville Immigration Bar President Elliott Ozment joined in calling for the installation of an immigration judge in Nashville to help alleviate the backlog of immigration cases arising from 287(g).