

Federal 'detainer requests' for suspected immigration violators cause longer jail stays, increase cost, research shows

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Credit: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

(Phys.org) —Jail stays and costs increase dramatically when federal immigration authorities request that inmates be held under what are called "detainer requests," according to research by University of

Washington sociologist Katherine Beckett.

A detainer request is how Immigration and Customs Enforcement, part of the federal [Department of Homeland Security](#), informs local law enforcement authorities of its intention to assume custody of an individual when he or she is released from jail. The requests are meant to lengthen an inmate's stay by no longer than 48 hours, excluding weekends and holidays.

But in a research study commissioned by the Northwest Defenders Association, Beckett, a UW professor of sociology and law, and graduate student Heather Evans, studied records of about 33,000 King County jail bookings associated with releases in 2011.

Using a statistical regression method, they found that detainer requests had the effect of extending jail stays by an average of 161 percent and cost the county about \$3 million each year in additional jail costs.

They also found that nearly two-thirds of the people flagged in this manner by Immigration and Customs Enforcement were not charged with a felony offense related to their booking, and about one in eight were charged with no crime at all. Beckett said this casts doubt on the government contention that detainer requests mainly target people with serious criminal offenses and histories.

Beckett, who is with the UW's Law, Societies and Justice program, said King County jails are not holding otherwise releasable inmates for longer than 48 hours, but that detainers affect the decisions made by people under arrest. People aware that [immigration enforcement](#) is pursuing them might plead guilty to buy time to make family and housing arrangements, she said, and may not post bail, fearing they'd never get the money back.

"So it's not that people are being held longer than the rules allow, but rather that their decisions about the criminal matter are affected by the presence of a detainer," Beckett said, adding that court decisions regarding pre-trial release may also be affected by the presence of detainer requests.

The researchers also determined that federal detainer requests have a powerful impact on the Hispanic community, with more than one-fourth of all King County jail inmates identified as Hispanic being transferred to federal custody upon release.

The research proves timely, Beckett said, because the King County Council is preparing to revisit and possibly amend its ordinance dictating how the county will respond to such requests.

More information: faculty.washington.edu/kbeckett/report/

Provided by University of Washington

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