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Policy Brief: Unchecked ICE Violence Sweeps in More U.S. Citizens, People with Legal Status, and People Applying for Legal Status

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In the remaining months of the summer, ICE continued to conduct unlawful and often violent arrests and detentions, resulting in serious abuses, injuries, and multiple deaths. The sweep of enforcement is so broad that ICE is increasingly regularly detaining people going through the processes required by law to obtain legal status or who already have legal status, not to mention U.S. citizens. Arrests are regularly happening at schools, hospitals and clinics, in [airports](#) and even at [DHS offices](#) during people's interviews for green cards or another legal status. The harm goes well beyond the many people who are arrested and denied the opportunity to complete their legal immigration cases, but hurts their families, businesses and local economies where they work as nurses, teachers, pastors, and a baseball coach -- just to name a few from the many examples of people arrested in the past few months that are described below.

Despite [growing public opposition](#), Congress still has not taken meaningful steps to stop these ongoing lawless practices. Instead, Congress has given DHS nearly \$250 billion for immigration enforcement—an unprecedented sum that could be better used to help Americans meet basic needs amid the current affordability crisis.

Leaders in Congress should demand accountability and reforms that ensure the nation's immigration agencies operate in a fair, lawful, and humane manner and bring order and safety to American communities. This policy brief highlights recent actions by ICE and offers solutions for reforming the system drawn from AILA's proposal: [A Better Way on Immigration](#).

ICE's immigration enforcement tactics and ineffective detention standards are causing unprecedented numbers of deaths and serious injuries.

- On August 11, ICE agents [violently detained](#) Mexican national Jose Mejia Hernandez as he was walking to a bus station in Arlington, Virginia, leaving him with brain injuries. He has filed a formal complaint with the Arlington Police Department calling for an investigation.
- On August 10, an ICE agent [pointed his gun](#) at U.S. citizen Carolina Molina in Falls Church, Virginia after accusing her of trying to run them over, which she denied.
- On July 30, ICE agents [pepper sprayed](#) 72-year-old U.S. citizen Linda Wolff as she was protesting on the sidewalk in New York City near where an ICE vehicle broke down on the street. The action took place while the ICE agents were waiting to tow the vehicle. She is now pursuing legal action.
- On July 22, plain clothed ICE agents [arrested](#) a Ukrainian woman at San Francisco International Airport, throwing her to the ground and remaining on top of her while she claimed they were choking her.

- On July 15, ICE [arrested and detained](#) Gabriel Johnson, a 55-year-old Liberian pastor who has had legal immigration status for four decades, at his home in North Carolina, reportedly over a misunderstanding over a missed immigration appointment. After the detention facility he was sent to failed to provide his stroke medication and adequate food and water, he suffered a stroke on July 30 at the Prairieland Detention Center in Texas and is now paralyzed on his left side.
- On July 13, an ICE agent fatally shot Johan Sebastián Guerrero in his car in Maine. DHS claims Guerrero, a Colombian national, had tried to hit the agent with the vehicle. Initial reports indicate the agents involved [were not wearing body cameras](#) and Guerrero was [not the target](#) of the enforcement operation.
- On July 7, ICE agents [fatally shot](#) Lorenzo Salgado Araujo, a Mexican national who was on his way to work, in Houston during an attempted traffic stop. Salgado Araujo's son said that his father had been in the U.S. for 35 years and was in the process of obtaining his legal work permit. While DHS claims that Salgado Araujo tried to "weaponize his vehicle," eyewitnesses dispute this claim. The agents involved were [not wearing body cameras](#). **Immigration agents have shot over 21 people since the start of the Administration.**

[A Better Way on Immigration:](#) The Trump Administration [has eliminated oversight entities](#) that Congress created to check abusive practices in enforcement and [detention](#). Congress must restore public trust in the immigration system by establishing [a robust, independent oversight body](#) with the authority to stop [ICE abuses](#). Congress should also codify humane and effective enforcement standards that restrict the use of force and require immigration agents to undergo extensive and ongoing law enforcement training, identify themselves in enforcement actions, and use body-worn cameras. Violations of these standards should be checked by enforceable consequences and should result in exclusion of evidence and dismissal of the immigration court case. Rigorous investigations into officer misconduct must be conducted, and if necessary, prosecutions filed against wrongdoers. It took far too long for ICE officer Christian Castro to be [taken into custody and charged](#), 9 months after his crimes related to his shooting a Venezuelan man in Minneapolis earlier this year.

ICE is not going after the "worst of the worst" but regularly detains U.S. citizens, people with legal status or applying for legal status – including health care professionals, U.S. citizens, religious workers, and children.

- On August 16, ICE agents [detained](#) Oswaldo Pirela, a Venezuelan catching coach for the MLB San Diego Padres franchise while he was traveling for work at the El Paso Airport. He entered the U.S. in 2014 and has an active pending asylum case.
- On August 7, ICE agents [detained](#) U.S. citizen Brittany Ramirez in Norfolk, Virginia as she was attempting to retrieve her fiancé's truck after he was arrested by ICE. Agents handcuffed her, questioned the validity of her identification and Social Security information, and left her four-year-old sister unattended until their 15-year-old sister arrived. Ramirez was taken to the Norfolk Federal Building and later released with bruising around her wrists.
- On July 30, ICE agents [arrested and detained](#) a Zambian registered nurse while she was at Boston Logan International Airport. She works at Maine Medical Center in Portland, ME and is legally authorized to live and work in the U.S. and has a pending asylum application.
- On July 28, ICE agents [arrested and detained](#) a Cameroonian public health researcher who works at Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health at Baltimore-Washington

Airport as she was boarding a flight. She has a pending asylum application and a valid work authorization until 2029. She was eventually released from detention.

- On July 21, ICE agents [arrested and detained](#) an Ethiopian instructor at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy at Dallas Fort Worth Airport as he was returning from the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy conference where he was awarded a teacher of the year award. He has valid work authorization.

A Better Way on Immigration: DHS should [prioritize immigration enforcement](#) instead of indiscriminately detaining people to meet quotas that present no threat and in fact are contributing members of their communities who frequently have legal status or are in the process of applying. People who are waiting on USCIS to decide their cases are not responsible for the growing agency backlogs that delay their ability to secure or maintain legal status. Detaining and deporting them [hurts the businesses](#) that employ them and their American family members. Moreover, targeting people pursuing legal status discourages them from submitting themselves for vetting by the government and pushes them into the shadows, making the United States less safe. As with the [national security](#) and [law enforcement](#) fields, the successful and effective enforcement of immigration law requires prioritization that focuses on actual threats. Congress should protect individuals who are seeking or renewing legal status, and pose no risk, by ensuring that they can remain in the United States and continue working, while the government vets them and adjudicates their eligibility. Moreover, Congress should codify priorities based on public safety, national security, border security, and severity of criminal offenses.

ICE continues to conduct enforcement activities at schools, courthouses, and other sensitive locations.

- On August 26, ICE arrested several parents at school bus stations in Connecticut once their children boarded the buses to go to school. Senator Chris Murphy released a [statement](#) describing ICE's actions as "sinister".
- On August 22, ICE [detained](#) an Ecuadorian woman and her adult daughter at a hospital in Kissimmee, Florida after a car crash totaled their car. Both women have no criminal records and family members say the mother has a pending asylum case and valid work permit while the daughter has a visa that is valid until 2030.
- On July 28, ICE [arrested](#) a 45-year-old Mexican woman as she was leaving a Pima county courthouse. She has lived in the US since she was four years old, speaks fluent English and has three US citizen children. She was at the courthouse to pay a noise complaint citation.

A Better Way on Immigration: Congress should enact laws that [prohibit immigration enforcement actions at sensitive locations](#)—such as courthouses, schools, hospitals, and houses of worship—and mandate the appropriate warrants for arrests and entries.