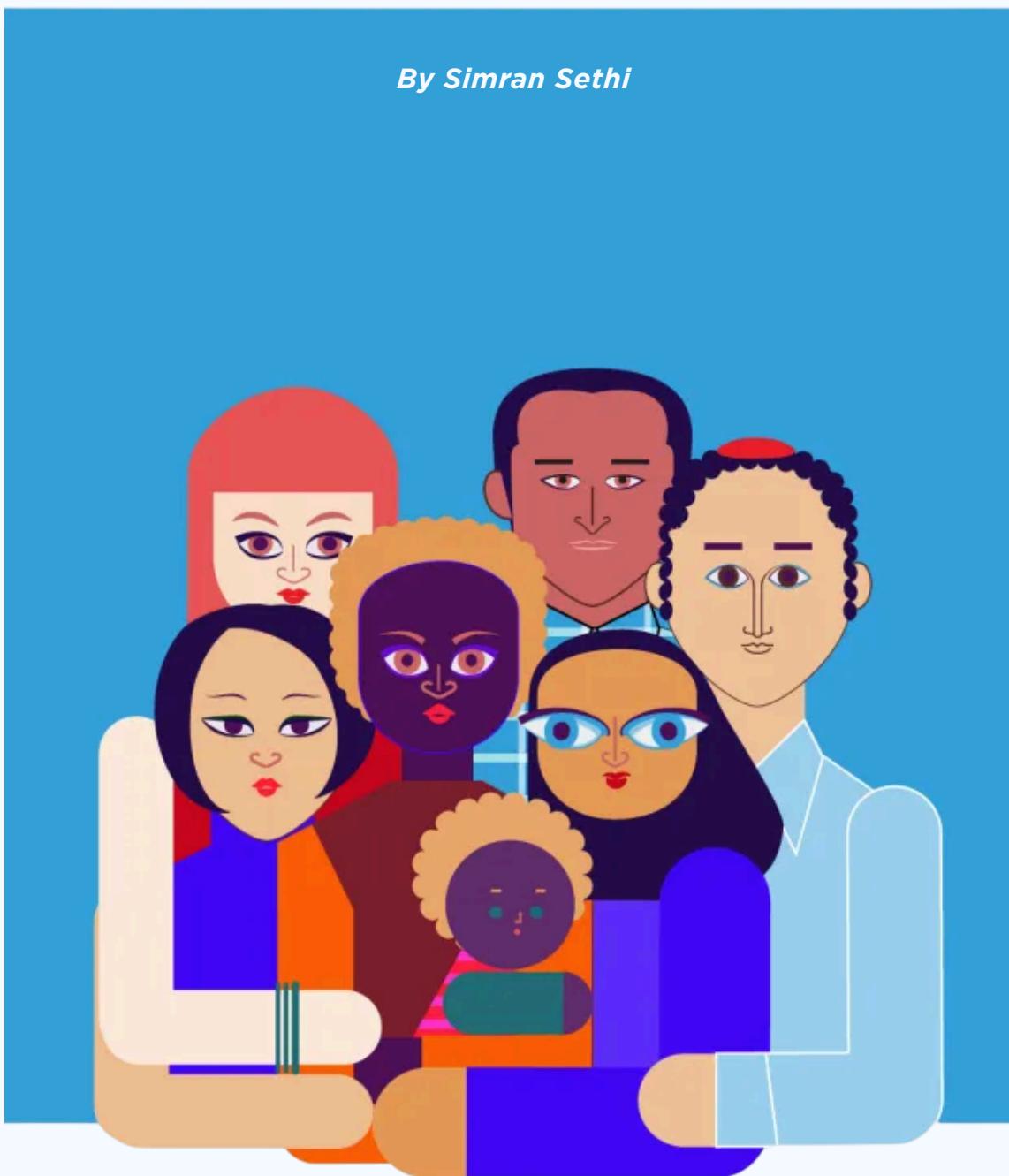


How to Manage Encounters with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

By Simran Sethi



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This guide has been created for informational purposes only and is not legal advice. It has been adapted from the [Immigrant Legal Resource Center Family Preparedness Plan](#), [Immigrant Defense](#), and [ACLU Know Your Rights with ICE](#) guides, plus information from organizations listed under Additional Resources and conversations with those directly impacted. Information is accurate as of December 23, 2025.

If you or someone you love may be impacted by ICE, learn how to develop a preparedness plan [here](#).

Stay Updated on Changing Policies

Before traveling to or from the United States, make sure you are updated on policies. [This FAQ](#) can help you understand the Entry Ban Proclamations and immigration policy updates issued in December 2025. The United We Dream guide on [Traveling with DACA](#) can also help.

Know Your Rights

In the United States, both citizens and noncitizens have legal rights. Make sure you, your family members (including children), housemates, neighbors, and co-workers—regardless of their immigration status—know their rights. This includes the right to remain silent if ICE or the police come to your home or workplace or stop you in public.

- [Review information](#) on who may be investigated by ICE and how to respond. Videos of the same information can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
- Carry a Know Your Rights [red card](#) or [mini card](#) (translated into multiple languages) that explains your right to remain silent in case you are stopped or interrogated by ICE or police officers.
- Download the Know Your Rights app [here](#). The app will allow you to announce your rights in English and send a text to a preselected list of contacts. You may also want to download the [ReadyNow! app](#) that can alert legal counsel, loved ones, and your employer and share pertinent information if you are detained.
- If you are a green card holder, review [these](#) specific Know Your Rights guidelines.

Carry Your Documents

- U.S. citizens are not required to carry identification or documentation. However, they may wish to carry proof of citizenship for added safety. Carry a color photocopy of the passport page or a [passport card](#) (not valid for international travel) rather than a digital copy that would require you to give ICE access to your phone. You may also want to let a trusted person know where your passport is located, in the event it has to be retrieved.
- Under [federal law](#), a lawful permanent resident "eighteen years of age and over, shall at all times carry with him and have in his personal possession any certificate of alien registration or alien registration receipt card issued to him. Make sure to carry a valid work permit or green card, if you have one. If you do not have one, it is advisable to carry a municipal ID, state ID, or driver's license if the ID was issued in the United States and does not contain information about your immigration status or country of origin.
- If you have applied for an employment authorization document or have a pending immigration case, carry a copy of your receipt from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).
- If you have undocumented status and have lived in the United States for two or more years, proof of time spent in the country may help ensure you receive due process. Recommended documents include tax filings, rental agreements, utility bills, and other documents that demonstrate residency. Additional information on documentation can be found on [The Legal Aid Society](#) website.
- Carry—or, ideally, memorize—the telephone number of someone who can contact your immigration attorney, access your important documents, and enact your preparedness plan, if needed. Make sure you have shared your A-number, date and place of birth and full legal name with your contact.

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Carry Your Documents (continued)

- Carry contact information for the nearest consulate for your country of origin. They are responsible for organizing travel documents for anyone who is deported. Determine if they have a department that assists nationals in distress. (The Philippine Embassy and its consulates, for example, offer an [Assistance to Nationals hotline](#), conduct welfare checks to detainees, and release funds to Philippine nationals to support legal and related fees.)

Support Your Well-being

- Explore options that can support your emotional and mental well-being. The [Informed Immigrant guide](#) on mental health is a great starting point. [Asians Do Therapy](#) gives an overview on what therapy is and how to find a therapist. Therapists who support Asian community members and free therapy options can be sourced through the [Asian Mental Health Collective](#). Additional therapy options can be found through the [South Asian Mental Health Initiative & Network](#) and [National Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Network](#). The UndocuHealth [Resilience and Community Care Toolkit](#) is also helpful.
- A mental health coping guide for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) residents can be found [here](#), and a directory of free or low-cost mental health services for undocumented people can be found [here](#).

If You are Approached ...

Review the [IDP guide](#) on how to respond if ICE approaches you in public or at home. Remain calm and keep your hands visible. Do not lie or show false documents. Do not try to physically resist arrest or run away. If you flee, ICE or law enforcement may use this against you. You have the right to remain silent about your country of birth, your immigration status, and how you entered the United States if you are asked by any law enforcement officials.

If You are Approached in Public

ICE agents may wear masks or civilian clothes, or approach in an unmarked vehicle. Review the Immigrant Defense Project ([IDP](#))[.guide](#) on how to respond if ICE approaches your car or person. When ICE agents arrest someone in public/after stopping a car, it typically happens quickly. They may call your name out loud and ask you to confirm your name and then detain you.

Before you say your name or anything else, ask, “Am I free to go?”

- If they say “yes,” say, “I don’t want to answer your questions” or “I’d rather not speak with you right now,” and walk away.
- If they say “no,” remain silent. Say, “I want to use my right not to answer questions” and then “I want to speak to a lawyer.”

Do not answer questions about your immigration status or where you were born. Law enforcement will use any information you provide against you.

Do not hand over any documents such as a passport, consular IDs, or expired visas.

If ICE starts to search inside your pockets or belongings, say, “I do not consent to a search.”

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If You are Approached in Criminal Court or at a Scheduled Check-in

Review the information above. Memorize or carry the phone numbers of the person you will call in an emergency.

You have the right to refuse to sign anything before you talk to a lawyer. Do not sign anything you do not understand and/or agree with. That could eliminate your right to speak with a lawyer or have a hearing in front of an immigration judge and may result in you being deported immediately without a hearing. You have the right to speak to a lawyer and the right to make a phone call. *Ask to speak with a lawyer before you are detained.*

If ICE is at Your Door

Review the information above and the [IDP guide](#) on how to respond if ICE approaches you at home.

Do not open the door for ICE or any police officer without a signed warrant. You do not need to open the door unless an agent can show you a warrant with a clear header from a court, signed by a judge with your specific and correct name and address, and today's date. If the police or ICE knock on your door, ask them to slide the search warrant under the door or show it through a window. Make sure the warrant is signed by a judge and has your address on it. If ICE or the police do not have this, then you do not have to open the door. Once you open the door, you lose certain rights.

Keep a [Know Your Rights red card](#) on you and by your door at all times. The card explains your rights and that you do not have to open the door. You can slide the card under the door to ICE, show it to ICE, or read the English side of the card to ICE. Have your children and other family members practice showing it or sliding it under the door.

You have the right to remain silent and can refuse to answer ICE's questions. Say that you want to remain silent until you speak with a lawyer. Do not answer any questions, especially about your birthplace, immigration status, or how you entered the United States. Do not give ICE any personal information about yourself or anyone in your family. Have your children and others in your family and household practice saying "No" to ICE. If they are looking for someone else, ask them to leave contact information. You don't have to tell them where to find the person and you should not lie.

If You are Detained by ICE

Review the information above and familiarize yourself with [ICE's National Detainee Handbook](#) (offered in multiple languages). Information on the removal process is outlined [here](#).

You have the right to a hearing to challenge a deportation order, unless you have waived your right to a hearing, signed a "Stipulated Removal Order," or taken "voluntary departure."

You have the right to an attorney, but the government does not have to provide one for you. If you do not have a lawyer, ask the court to allow you time to find one. It is important to work with experienced legal counsel when addressing immigration challenges. Nolo's guides to [vetting immigration lawyers](#) and [seeking pro bono counsel](#) may be useful. [Immigrant Defense Project](#) offers a free legal email and helpline and [useful list](#) of information to have on-hand when contacting legal counsel. [Asian Americans Advancing Justice SoCal](#) offers phone support in English and multiple Asian languages. [Project Corazon](#) offers free legal help to asylum-seekers. The [Immigration Advocates Network National Immigration Legal Services Directory](#) lists nonprofit organizations that can also provide free or low-cost immigration legal services. The [Muslim Legal Fund](#) also offers legal assistance.

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🔑 If You are Arrested by ICE

There are some cases in which a person might not have a right to see an immigration judge. If you do not have the right to see an immigration judge, ask to speak to a lawyer immediately. Immigration officers do not always know or tell you about exceptions that might apply to you. If you fear persecution or torture in your home country, tell the immigration official and, again, contact a lawyer. You have additional rights if you have these fears.

You may be eligible for release with a bond (that usually involves paying money to the federal government as collateral for promising to continue to appear for your Immigration Court hearings). However, ICE and the Immigration Courts are increasingly denying people this option.

Separate from an immigration bond, some may request a release from immigration custody by filing a habeas corpus petition. This is a complicated legal filing but possible to file regardless of status. You may need to proceed with your underlying Immigration Court case as you pursue a habeas case. Information about online immigration proceedings can be found [here](#).

ICE policy should allow you to hold and wear articles of faith, practice your religion, and adhere to dietary restrictions (for religious or medical reasons) while in detention. However, there are numerous reports across faith traditions that these standards are not always honored. Consult your attorney or organizations such as the Sikh Coalition if your religious rights are being violated.

🏢 If an Employee is Detained by ICE

Review [this guide](#) from the National Immigration Law Center for employers. You may wish to develop a written Response Plan that can be shared with all employees, provide a Know-Your-Rights training for staff, and compile a list of lawyers or legal support organizations that can provide legal advice.

If ICE tries to enter a public area of your business, you can say: "I am the employer. You cannot go to other areas of the workplace without my permission." If agents try to enter private areas of your business, you can say: "This is a private area. You cannot enter without a judicial warrant signed by a judge. Do you have a judicial warrant?" If the agents provide a warrant, make sure it is dated and signed by a judge. You can still decline to give consent for the search.

If agents try to question you or your employees, you can remind them they have a right to remain silent and to ask for an attorney.

👨‍👩‍👧 If a Loved One is Detained by ICE

Try to prioritize your well-being so you can be supportive for your loved one. The resources listed above under "Supporting Your Well-Being" can help. You can find background information on ICE detention [here](#) and a list of detention centers [here](#). It may find it helpful to review ICE's National Detention Standards and National Detainee Handbook so you know the kind of care your loved one should receive.

The National Immigration Law Center has a detailed guide on how to use the ICE Online Detainee Locator System to find loved ones who have been detained by ICE. In order to locate someone in the system, you need to know their A number, first and last name, and date and place of birth. The 8- or 9-digit A-number is listed on all Department of Homeland Security and Executive Office for Immigration Review correspondence. You may also need to search the Bureau of Prisons website. On the dropdown menu, choose "INS number" for the A-number.

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If a Loved One is Detained by ICE (continued)

Use [this locator](#) for minors in immigration custody. All locators search names exactly as they were entered into the system. Try different versions of their name (spellings and order of first and last name), if the correct name does not work, and note that it can take time for the system to update. There may be gaps in information when people are transferred to or between facilities.

After someone is detained, they should be allowed to make an initial phone call to a family member or friend. They are only permitted to make collect calls. Be prepared to accept a call from an unknown number. If you do not answer the call, the detained person will not be able to leave a message.

Detention centers offer different methods of getting outside funds to detainees. They can be used in the detention center commissary or for calls. ICE Detention Centers use the [Access Corrections](#) website and app to receive these funds. The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) uses [MoneyGram](#). Some ICE detention facilities give detainees access to a tablet that they can use to call or text through apps from ["Getting Out"](#). Any non-legal calls may be monitored and/or recorded. The detention center should put any remaining commissary funds onto a pre-loaded debit card that is given to the detainee upon departure.

To see if your detained loved one has an upcoming Immigration Court hearing, or determine the status of a prior Immigration Court hearing, check the [EOIR Automated Case Information website](#) or call 1-800-898-7180. Additional information on how to support people in detainment can be found in the California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice [resource guide](#) (written for people detained in California, but has additional information relevant to the entire United States).

Additional Resources

Resources that can teach you about your rights include:

- [Acacia Center for Justice](#)
- [ACLU](#)
- [Asian Americans Advancing Justice SoCal \(AJSOCAL\)](#)
- [Asian Law Caucus](#)
- [Asian Mental Health Collective](#)
- [Collective Freedom](#)
- [Immigrant Defense Project \(IDP\)](#)
- [Immigrant Legal Resource Center \(ILRC\)](#)
- [Informed Immigrant](#)
- [Legal Aid Society](#)
- [Montgomery County Immigrant Rights Collective](#)
- [Muslim Civic Coalition](#)
- [Muslims for Just Futures](#)
- [Muslim Legal Fund](#)
- [National Immigration Law Center \(NILC\)](#)
- [National Korean American Service and Education Consortium](#)
- [SEARAC Community Resources](#)
- [South Asian Legal Defense and Education Fund \(SALDEF\)](#)
- [Stop AAPI Hate](#)
- [United We Dream](#)

Simran Sethi is a Media Fellow at the Nova Institute for Health.