FALL 2026 IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

A report from the Governor's Office of New Americans to the Illinois Accountability Commission detailing enforcement trends between January to September 2026

Governor's Office of New Americans

October 2026

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Introduction

After many months of well-documented escalation, violence, economic impacts, wrongful arrests, and fear brought to the Chicagoland area by Operation Midway Blitz (OMB), Illinois continues to feel the impact of the new era of immigration enforcement that it brought in. Illinoisians continue to experience supercharged immigration enforcement activity, high arrest numbers, mass detention, and a slew of policy changes that make life harder for undocumented immigrants, immigrants with legal status, and US citizens alike.[1]

The Governor's Office of New Americans (ONA) presents the following update on federal immigration-related activities and their impact on Illinois to the Illinois Accountability Commission as a supplement to the investigative findings, recommendations, and report developed through the Commission's extensive investigation of Operation Midway Blitz. Information in this update primarily reflects the period from **January 1, 2026** to **September 30, 2026,** and has been informed by ONA's ongoing engagement of key partners driving Illinois' immigrant-serving infrastructure.

2026 Immigration Enforcement Trends in Illinois

ICE arrests have now surged nationwide, leveraging existing enforcement and criminal-legal touchpoints and other low-profile strategies to continue to make high numbers of arrests of largely non-criminal Illinoisians outside of the public eye.

In place of the indiscriminate sweeps that were the hallmark of OMB, partners have reported seeing more low-profile enforcement activity, like arrests in and around county courthouses and ongoing arrests at ICE check-ins.

The following section details developments across on-the-ground immigration enforcement.

'Shadow Surge': Trends in Immigration Arrests in Illinois and Nationwide

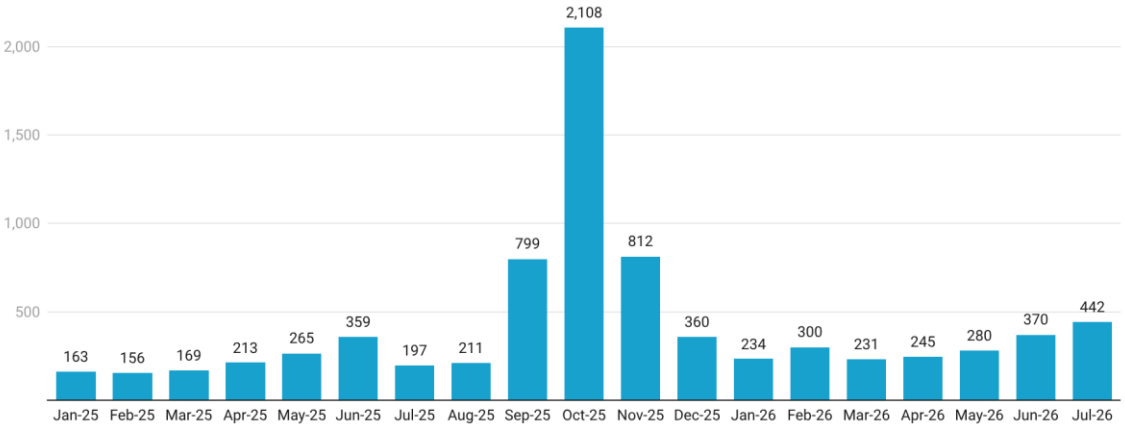
Heightened immigration enforcement continues in Illinois and across the country – though the tactics look different. As was documented by the IAC, nationwide arrests have continued to climb to record highs under the Trump Administration. In 2024, under the Biden administration, average monthly arrests were under 8,500. In contrast, under the Trump administration, in 2025, average monthly arrests were almost 27,000 and, as of July of this year, the average for 2026 has climbed to almost 36,500 and continues to rise. In Illinois, while the scale of roving patrols and neighborhood escalations in broad daylight

[1] The Trump Administration has made several changes to immigration policy through executive order, policy change, and rulemaking. A complete list of actions can be found through the Immigration Policy Tracking Project.

have decreased, arrest numbers have still steadily climbed month over month this summer after a sharp decrease immediately following a spike in September, October, and November of the OMB period (Figure 1).

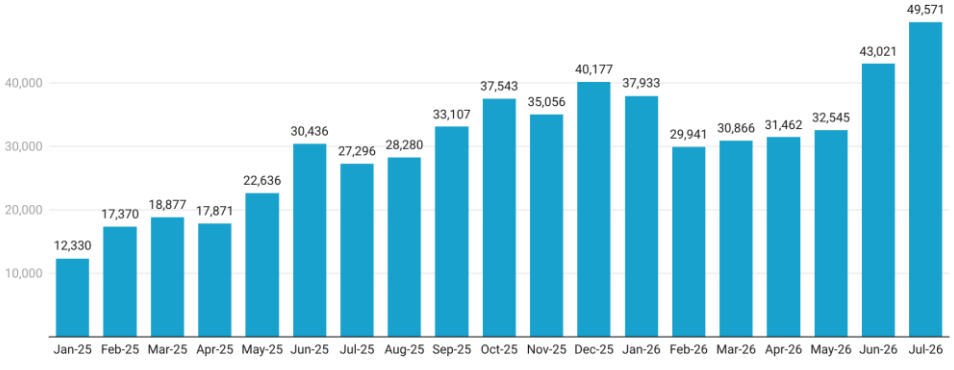
While no single city has experienced the same months-long occupation and targeting seen in Chicago and Minnesota during OMB and Operation Metro Surge, respectively, nationwide immigration arrests have hit record highs this summer (Figure 2). While monthly nationwide arrests hovered between 30,000 to 40,000 during the OMB period, this summer, arrests have climbed to over 43,000 in June, 45,000 in July, and, a record nearly 51,000 arrests in August.[2] While select cities are not feeling the brunt of long-term outsize immigration operations, ICE enforcement is occurring on a larger scale nationwide and cities across the country are seeing shorter arrest surges.

Figure 1: Illinois Arrests By Month



Source: The Deportation Data Project • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 2: Nationwide Arrests By Month



Source: Deportation Data Project • Created with Datawrapper

[2] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "ICE's August Arrests Break Record for Number of Illegal Aliens Arrested: Homeland Security," U.S. Department of Homeland Security, September 2, 2026, https://www.dhs.gov/news/2026/09/02/ices-august-arrests-break-record-number-illegal-aliens-arrested.

In a comparison of arrest data nationwide, the Marshall Project found that between March and July of 2026, immigration arrests more than doubled in 15 states and Washington, D.C., largely driven by expanded 287(g) agreements, or agreements authorizing local law enforcement to assist in federal immigration enforcement, with local law enforcement across the country, with roughly 2,000 agreements between ICE and state and local law enforcement in place nationwide.[3] States like Ohio and Missouri, which had no agreements in place in 2024, now have 20 and 130 agreements, respectively. Even states and localities that have banned these agreements, including Illinois, have seen a rise in hotline calls reporting arrests and detention. This rise in ICE presence was contextualized in a post by DHS on September 26, 2026, claiming that they are conducting a "public safety surge" in sanctuary cities, focusing the deployment of federal agents to cities without 287(g) agreements between local law enforcement and federal authorities.[4,5]

A deeper analysis of available nationwide arrest data shows that, similar to 2025 data analyzed by the IAC, nationwide increases are still largely driven by individuals with no prior criminal convictions, despite continued claims from the Trump Administration that they are targeting the "worst of the worst" (Figure 3).[6] However, when compared with previous concerted arrest efforts by the Trump Administration in 2025, individuals with orders of removal comprise an increasing percentage of arrests (Figure 4). This is, in part, due to shrinking legal pathways and changes in the immigration court system that are making it harder to appear and access due process, as detailed in the following sections.

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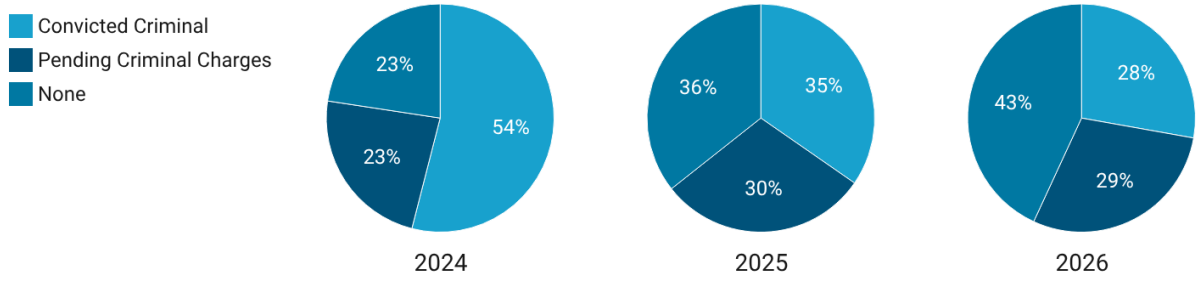
[3] Lauren Villagran et al., "Inside the 'Shadow Surge' Driving ICE Arrests to New Heights," The Marshall Project, September 10, 2026, https://www.themarshallproject.org/2026/09/10/ice-arrests-immigrants-local-police-287g.

[4]Jazmine Ulloa et al., "A Quiet ICE Surge That Unfolded 'Everywhere All at Once' This Summer," The New York Times, September 25, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/25/us/ice-surge-immigration-arrests.html.

[5]Homeland Security (@DHSgov), X (formerly Twitter), September 26, 2026, https://x.com/DHSgov/status/2104056103357018118.

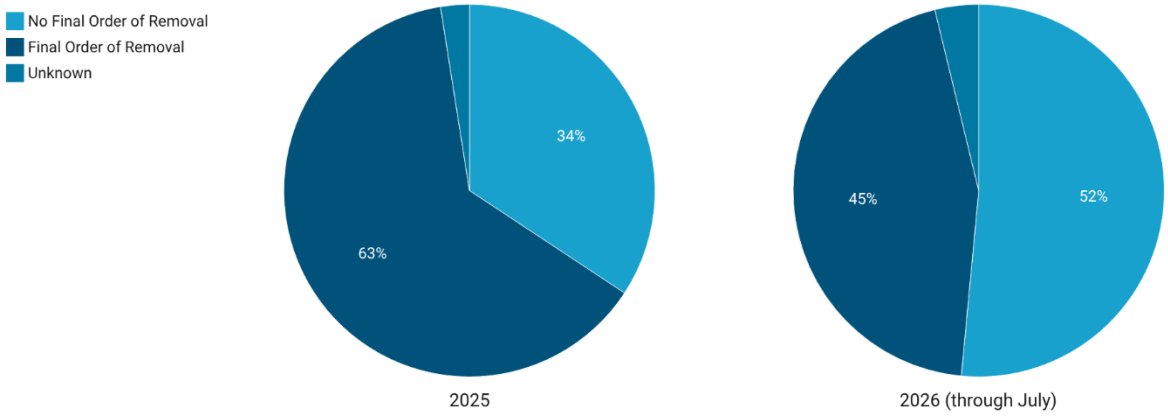
[6] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "WORST OF THE WORST: ICE Arrests Pedophiles, Sexual Predators, and Other Dangerous Illegal Aliens Across the Country," U.S. Department of Homeland Security, October 2, 2026, https://www.dhs.gov/news/2026/10/02/worst-worst-ice-arrests-pedophiles-sexual-predators-and-other-dangerous-illegal.

Figure 3: Percent of Individuals with a Criminal Charge or Conviction at the Time of ICE Arrest



Source: Deportation Data Project • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 4: Percent of Individuals with a Final Order of Removal at Time of ICE Arrest



Source: Deportation Data Project • Created with Datawrapper

Illinois' Response Infrastructure: The Illinois Unified System

Over the last four decades, a coalition of Illinois' immigrant serving community organizations, legal providers, and advocates have expanded access to immigration legal services to mitigate the impacts of family separation and deportation. This coordinated response was strengthened and formalized during Operation Midway Blitz to become the Illinois Unified System. This partnership continues to respond to the uptick in arrests and detention by connecting families to free, high-quality legal services and other resources. Organizations across the system coordinate across intake points to centrally triage detained individuals for legal screenings in a unified system. As detailed in the Commission's final report, this infrastructure leverages:

- **A centralized, statewide hotline:** The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) manages the Family Support Network Hotline, a multilingual phone

SPOTLIGHT: ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT

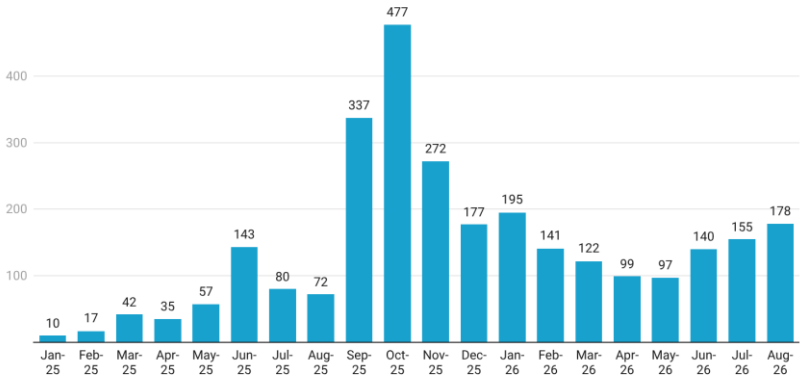
In response to growing arrests at ICE check-ins throughout the fall of 2025, The Resurrection Project built **The Accompaniment Project**, a partnership with a panel of pro bono attorneys managed by the Chicago Bar Foundation to offer pro se and no cost accompaniment to ICE check-ins. Project staff identify individuals and support attorneys in preparing G-28 forms ahead of appointments. Over the past year, the ICE check-in Accompaniment Project has accompanied over 30 individuals to Chicago-area check-ins, at the Broadview processing center, the ICE Field Office and the ISAP location.

line that connects immigrant families to a range of supports, including rapid response and immigration legal services.

- **Two networks of state-funded immigrant legal service providers:** The Resurrection Project (TRP) administers grants to legal services partners statewide through both the Illinois Access to Justice Program and the Illinois Family Support Program. Together, these two programs fund legal screenings, limited and full scope representation, pro se workshops, and centralized intake systems to coordinate referrals and improve collaboration among community-based immigration legal service providers.
- **A coordinated detained legal services infrastructure:** Formed in 2022 by the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC), TRP, The Immigration Project (TIP), and the Law Office of the Cook County Public Defender (CCPD), the Midwest Immigrant Defenders Alliance (MIDA) coordinates activities across member organizations to provide free, high-quality legal services to detained immigrants.

Following decreasing arrest numbers in Illinois throughout the first quarter of 2026, organizations across this continuum of support have seen steady increases in the need for detained legal services starting in June 2026 that closely follow trends in the Illinois arrest data (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Illinois Unified System's Legal Referrals By Month



Source: The Resurrection Project • Created with Datawrapper

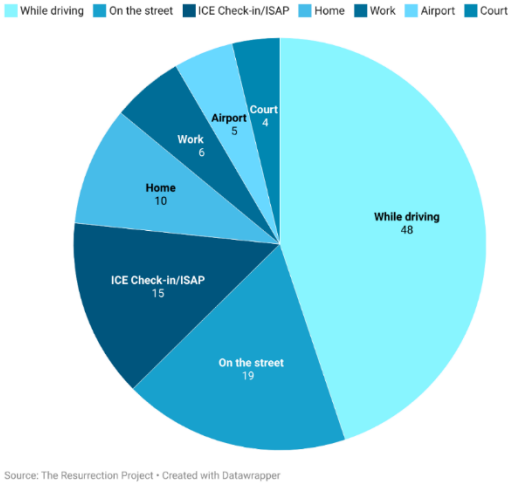
SPOTLIGHT: THE CHICAGO PROJECT

The Legal Aid Society (LAS), the legal aid arm of Metropolitan Family Services (MFS), launched **The Chicago Project** in spring 2026. The Chicago Project helps individuals whose civil rights have been violated pursue legal action, such as Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) claims, to hold the federal government accountable. The Chicago Project partners with pro bono attorneys to co-counsel cases and leverage philanthropic dollars to cover upfront costs, such as filing fees. The services they offer are free and are available in both English and Spanish.

Out of Sight: Rise in Low Profile Arrest Tactics and Mitigation Strategies

Over the course of 2026, in-the-field arrest tactics have transitioned to less public, targeted arrests while maintaining rising arrest numbers. The Illinois Unified System began reporting top arrest locations in mid-September. Data in Figure 6 represents a sampling of primary arrest locations across 124 referrals between September 13 and October 10, 2026. While many recent arrests tracked by partners in Illinois occur during traffic stops, partners have shared that there has been a rise in arrests at ICE or Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP) check-in offices and county courthouses.

Figure 6: Illinois Unified System Referral Top Arrest Locations (September 13-October 10, 2026)

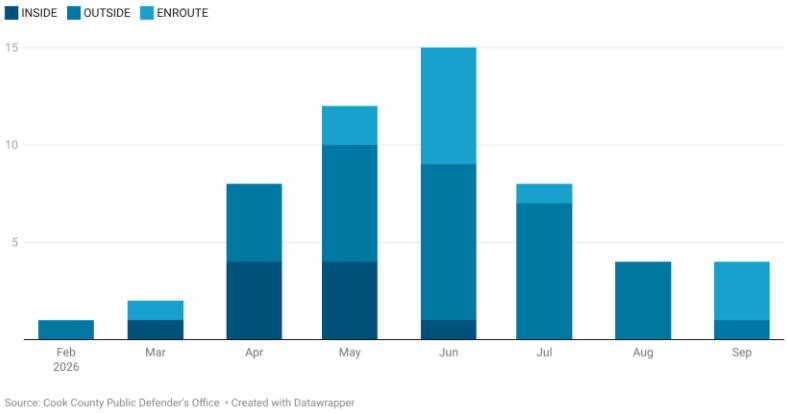


Source: The Resurrection Project • Created with Datawrapper

Arrests at County Court Houses

In December 2025, Governor Pritzker signed the Illinois Court Access, Safety, and Participation Act, which bans civil immigration enforcement within 1,000 feet of courthouses. Despite an active lawsuit filed by the Department of Justice challenging the law, it remains in effect. Despite the law's mandate, since February, the Law Office of the Cook County Public Defender's Office (CCPD) has recorded 89 incidents of ICE presence in, around, and while individuals are in transit to county courts, with 54 tracked incidents resulting in an arrest (Figure 7). This is likely an underrepresentation of total arrests and ICE presence, and only reflects instances observed by or shared with CCPD. Additional arrests have reportedly occurred at the Kane, Kankakee, Will, and other collar county courts.

Figure 7: CCPD-Tracked Arrests In, Near, and En Route to Cook County Courts 2026



Arrests at ICE Check-ins

Arrests continue at routine ICE check-ins related to the Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP) and other Alternatives to Detention (ATDs). These programs allow immigrants remain with their families and communities while their removal proceedings are pending and require routine check-ins with ICE or ISAP to fulfill program requirements. Organizations nationwide have noted an uptick in the number of arrests at ICE check-ins since the beginning of the Trump administration, preceded by a dramatic increase in scheduled in-person appointments.[7]

Ongoing Targeted Arrests

Lastly, ICE continues to make alleged targeted arrests in community, largely driven by the dramatic increase in removal orders detailed in the following section of this report. These more targeted arrests often employ the same profiling and reckless tactics that were used at scale during OMB. For example, on Monday, August 26, 2026, ICE agents engaged in a vehicular chase and reportedly used a Precision Immobilization Technique, a tactic involving law enforcement making contact with a vehicle they are pursuing in order to stop that vehicle.[8] This tactic was used during the near-fatal shooting of Marimar Martinez, and other incidents of reckless driving were recorded in the IAC's reporting.

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[7] Laura Rodríguez Presa and Joe Mahr, "Ice Arrests Shift to Courthouses and Immigration Check-Ins as Enforcement Intensifies in Chicago Area," Chicago Tribune, June 19, 2026, https://www.chicagotribune.com/2026/06/19/chicago-ice-arrests-uptick/.

[8] Evgenia Anastasakos and Caroline Kubzansky, "Crowd in McKinley Park Protests Ice after Agents Crash into Truck and Detain Driver on I-55 Ramp," Chicago Tribune, August 24, 2026, https://www.chicagotribune.com/2026/08/24/mckinley-park-ice-arrest-damen/.

Deportation at the Expense of Due Process: Changes to Immigration Court Proceedings

Since the beginning of the Trump Administration, concerning changes to immigration court have contributed to dramatic increases in orders of removal and made it more difficult to access due process in deportation proceedings.

In addition to on-the-ground enforcement, there have been significant changes to the process by which an individual arrested by ICE moves through immigration proceedings. All changes detailed in the following section have one aim: to move individuals to be ordered removed as quickly as possible, often by foregoing the legal processes they are entitled to.

Dramatic Increase in Orders of Removal

Within the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) manages immigration courts, which, unlike the independent courts of the judiciary branch, are administrative bodies and lack many of the protections and structure of the traditional court system: individuals are not guaranteed representation, judges are DOJ-appointed and not confirmed by the US Senate, and the federal rules of evidence are more relaxed. Historically, the Department of Justice has faced a years-long backlog of cases in the immigration courts, with over 3.5 million pending cases in 2024. While the Trump Administration has cited this backlog as the rationale for several reforms to the immigration legal process, the new system has a fundamentally different objective – deportation at the expense of due process and access to legal pathways.

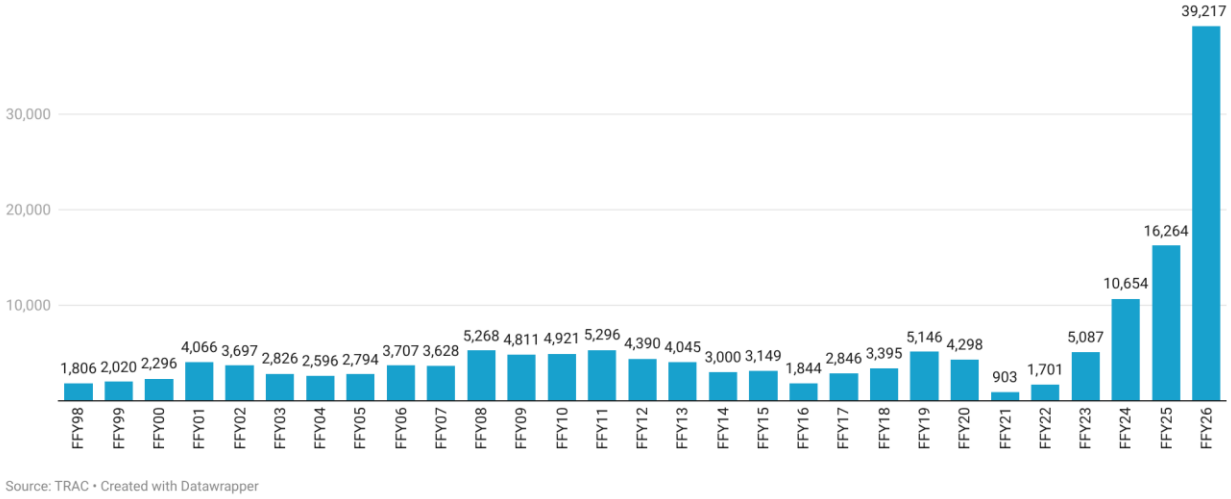
Immigration courts under EOIR have exclusive jurisdiction over removal proceedings and defensive filings for relief for individuals in removal proceedings. Proceedings are designed to give individuals the opportunity to appear before a judge, argue their case against removal, and seek potential relief through humanitarian and other claims.

Analysis of immigration court records by TRAC reveals that monthly case closures climbed to an all-time high of 100,773 in June 2026.[9] Of these cases, the number of removal orders issued by immigration courts has skyrocketed, and the percentage of total cases that result in a removal order have steadily risen. In federal fiscal year 2024 (FFY24), about 34% of all immigration court proceedings ended in a removal order. This number has risen dramatically during the last two years, under the Trump Administration. In FFY25, about 52% of cases resulted in a removal order and in FFY26, about 72% of cases ended with a removal order.

[9] "Removal Orders Jump While Immigration Court Closures Top 100,000 in June 2026," Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, July 21, 2026, https://tracreports.org/reports/776/.

In Illinois, this change has been felt even more acutely with the percentage of cases resulting in a removal order growing from approximately 32% (FFY24) to 84.5% (FFY26).[10] In June 2026 alone, the Chicago immigration court issued nearly 7,100 removal orders, seven times the national average during the Biden administration and the highest of any court in the country (Figure 8).[11] In fact, many advocates have observed that Chicago's immigration court has transformed into the national epicenter of removal orders.[12]

Figure 8: Illinois Immigration Court Proceedings Resulting in a Removal Order by Federal Fiscal Year (FFY)



Source: TRAC • Created with Datawrapper

The dramatic rise in removal orders can be explained in part by recent trends in immigration courts, including: "mega master" hearings, mandatory detention, changes in immigration judges, and limited access to asylum and other humanitarian claims. Specifically, partners have reported a rise in *in absentia* removal orders, or a removal order issued when an individual does not attend an immigration court hearing. Such *in absentia* orders are on the rise due to administrative changes, such as moving hearings up with little notice as has occurred in the "mega master" hearing scheme (Figure 9).

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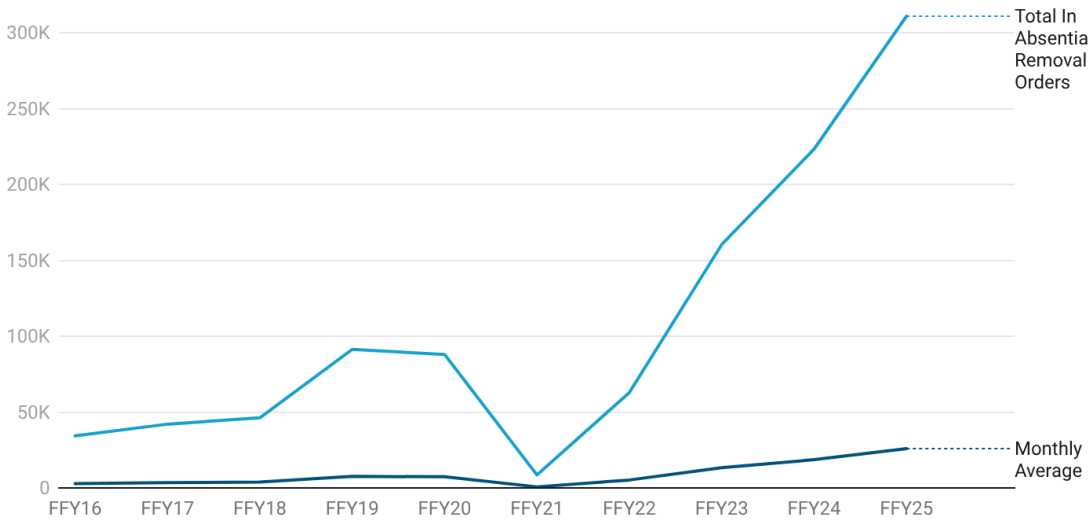
[10] "Outcomes of Immigration Court Proceedings," Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, accessed October 21, 2026, https://tracreports.org/phptools/immigration/closure/.

[11] Caroline Kubzansky and Joe Mahr, "'Deportation Factory': Chicago's Immigration Court Epicenter for Us Spike in Removal Orders, Analysis Shows," Chicago Tribune, July 24, 2026, https://www.chicagotribune.com/2026/07/24/chicago-immigration-court-removal-orders-analysis/.

[12] Caroline Kubzansky and Joe Mahr, "'Deportation Factory': Chicago's Immigration Court Epicenter for Us Spike in Removal Orders, Analysis Shows," Chicago Tribune, July 24, 2026, https://www.chicagotribune.com/2026/07/24/chicago-immigration-court-removal-orders-analysis/.

Figure 9: Nationwide *In Absentia* Removal Orders



Source: EOIR • Created with Datawrapper

"Mega Masters": Changes to Master Calendar Hearings

In May 2026, attorneys in select cities, including Chicago, began reporting a new immigration court practice now being called "mega master" hearings. This new practice repurposes master calendar hearings (also called "masters" or "MCH"), the procedural hearings that begin an individual's immigration proceedings, by overcrowding dockets, scheduling with little notice, and generally creating fear and chaos that results in noncitizens getting ordered removed.

Master calendar hearings should be an opportunity for individuals to hear and either admit or deny the facts of the government's case against them and request relief from removal, while giving an immigration judge the opportunity to assess initial eligibility for immigration relief. Master calendar hearings have always involved multiple individuals scheduled at the same time, but immigration judges generally had capacity to carefully consider each matter on a case-by-case basis. In "mega masters," courtrooms and court hallways are packed with people – many of whom received notice of the hearing only days before – while immigration judges rush through proceedings, sometimes seeking to streamline proceedings by ordering written pleadings or otherwise confusing noncitizens

SPOTLIGHT: THE ILLINOIS HABEAS PROJECT

In response to the Trump administration's mandatory detention policy, the National Immigrant Justice Center, Chicago Bar Foundation, ACLU of Illinois, and other partners launched **The Illinois Habeas Project**. The project provides pro bono assistance to immigrants in Illinois who have been unlawfully detained, helping them to file federal habeas corpus petitions to seek release or a bond hearing. As of September 2026, 145 petitions have been filed and 78 people have been released, with 91% of petitions resulting in a favorable ruling. Most cases have been filed outside of the Norther District of Illinois, as individuals are transferred to other states after arrest.

and rushing them towards removal. Many noncitizens called into these "mega master" hearings are Spanish-speaking individuals without legal counsel.[13]

The National Immigrant Justice Center has reported that "mega master" hearings present significant threats to due process, as they create significant room for error due to the speed of hearings, lack of individual consideration, potential language barriers, and more.

Staff have also reported that many individuals have erroneously received *in absentia* removal orders even when they are present at immigration court, because of the chaos of the hearings and difficulty hearing when individuals are called before the judge. NIJC advises clients to collect proof of their attendance and have prepared additional know your rights materials for this new hearing format.[14]

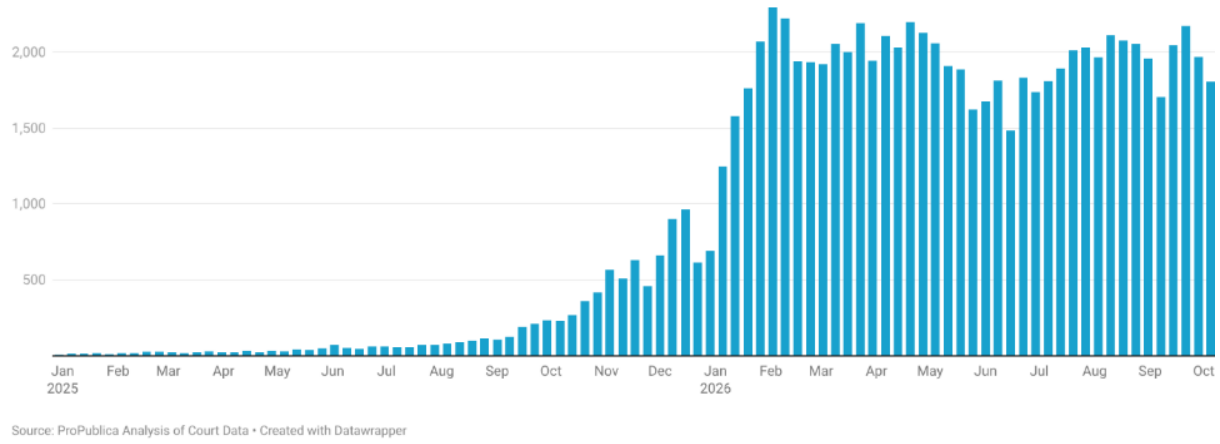
Mandatory Detention

Under the Trump administration immigration detention has surged, in large part due to the Administration's expansive view of mandatory detention. On September 5, 2025, the Board of Immigration Appeals issued a decision that reinterpreted longstanding statute to find that anyone who entered the United States without inspection is subject to a no-bond detention. This interpretation contradicted nearly three decades of practice that required detention only when people posed a genuine flight risk or a danger to the community. While this ruling was in force, the vast majority of arrested individuals were placed in indefinite immigration detention with no opportunity for bond. Federal court appeals of this new interpretation quickly ensued.

[13] Caroline Kubzansky and Joe Mahr, "'Deportation Factory': Chicago's Immigration Court Epicenter for Us Spike in Removal Orders, Analysis Shows," Chicago Tribune, July 24, 2026, https://www.chicagotribune.com/2026/07/24/chicago-immigration-court-removal-orders-analysis/.
[14] National Immigrant Justice Center, "Trump Administration Short Circuits Due Process with New Mass Hearings for Unrepresented Immigrants," National Immigrant Justice Center, May 29, 2026, https://immigrantjustice.org/press-release/trump-administration-short-circuits-due-process-with-new-mass-hearings-for-unrepresented-immigrants/.

The federal government won an appeal upholding their interpretation of mandatory detention in the U.S. Court of Appeals for both the Fifth and Eighth Circuits, which cover Texas and Louisiana, the top two ICE detention states and where over 64% of detainees in 2025 were last detained per ICE data collated by the Deportation Data Project. However, most federal appeals courts, including the Seventh Circuit, which includes Illinois, have ruled against the government's expanded interpretation of mandatory detention. With a split between the federal circuit courts of appeals, the Supreme Court has accepted a case to review the legality of the policy in their upcoming session.[15]

Figure 10: Habeas Petitions Challenging Immigration Detention Filed Over Time



Additionally, to combat mandatory detention, a record number of habeas petitions have been filed, with 85,252 cases filed by immigrants between January 1, 2025 and October 13, 2026 to contest their detention (Figure 10).[16] Nevertheless, the detained population nationwide has continued to climb, and the number of individuals in detention with no prior criminal conviction has grown (Figure 11, Figure 12).

[15] "Supreme Court to Scrutinize ICE's Mandatory Detention Policy for Immigrants," The Washington Post, October 1, 2026, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2026/10/01/supreme-court-agrees-review-ice-mandatory-detention-policy-immigrants/.

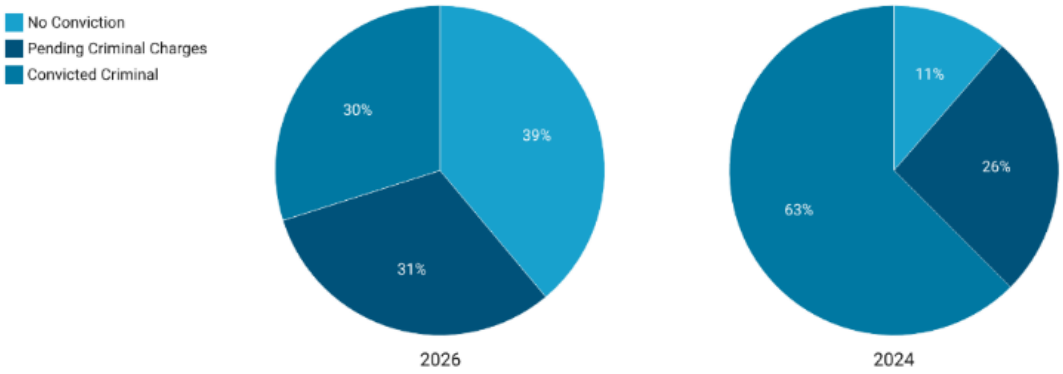
[16] "Tracking the Historic Rise of Habeas Cases Filed by Detained Immigrants." 2026. ProPublica. February 10, 2026. https://projects.propublica.org/habeas-tracker/.

Figure 11: Annual Nationwide ICE Detention Stays



Source: Deportation Data Project • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 12: 2026 vs 2024 Nationwide Individuals Arrested and Detained By ICE Criminal Status



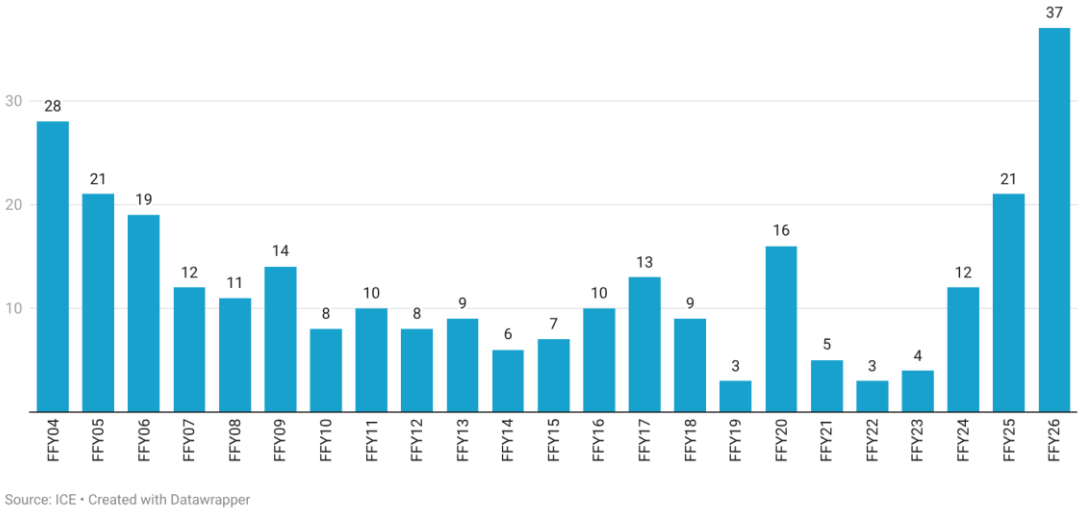
Source: Deportation Data Project • Created with Datawrapper

As more individuals are held in prolonged detention, medical neglect and dangerous conditions push individuals to accept "voluntary" departure agreements.[17] In FFY26, 37 individuals died in ICE custody, the highest single year count since the agency began operations in 2003 (Figure 13).[18]

[17] National Immigrant Justice Center, "After the Blitz: What Our Chicago Neighbors Are Facing in Ice Detention," National Immigrant Justice Center, July 2, 2026, https://immigrantjustice.org/research/after-the-blitz-what-our-chicago-neighbors-are-facing-in-detention/.

[18] Ximena Bustillo, "Immigrant Deaths in Ice Custody Nearly Double as Oversight Wanes," Bloomberg Law, September 30, 2026, https://news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/immigrant-deaths-in-ice-custody-nearly-double-as-oversight-wanes.

Figure 13: Deaths in ICE Custody by Federal Fiscal Year (FFY)

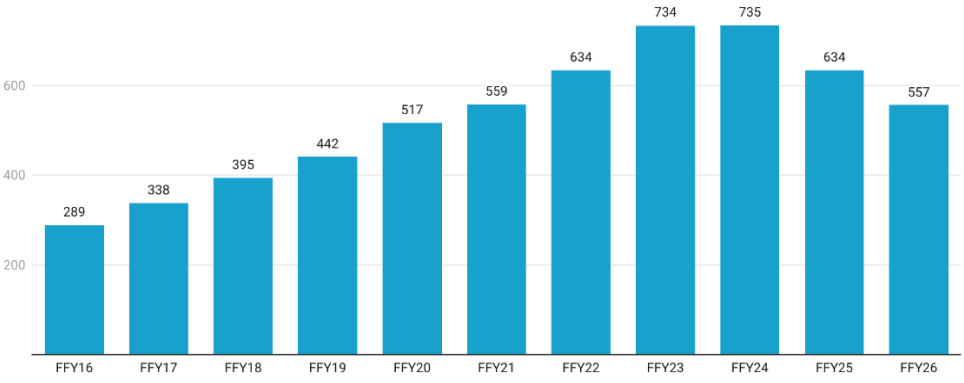


Source: ICE • Created with Datawrapper

'Green Light' for Mass Deportation: Changes to Immigration Judges

The Trump administration has made staggering changes to immigration court judges. In the face of a decades long backlog, rather than increase staffing in the Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), the administration has reportedly lost over a quarter of immigration judges in the past year due to nearly 100 firings and additional resignations (Figure 14). This reduction in capacity also includes over 400 legal assistants, attorney advisers and legal administrative specialists. Some former judges have interpreted this change as a "green light" from the administration to advance mass deportation and remove judges that stand in the way.[19]

Figure 14: Total Immigration Judges from Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2016-2026



Source: EOIR • Created with Datawrapper

[19]Anusha Mathur and Ximena Bustillo, "U.S. Has a Quarter Fewer Immigration Judges than It Did a Year Ago. Here's Why," NPR, February 23, 2026, https://www.npr.org/2026/02/23/g-s1-110911/trump-immigration-judges-dismissals-numbers.

Chicago's immigration court has felt these impacts acutely. From 2025 to February of 2026, The Chicago immigration court lost 35% (7/20) of its judges.[20] Firings have continued, with two additional judges fired recently as July 2026.[21]

To replace the judges who have quit or were fired, the administration has detailed hundreds of military judges with no experience practicing immigration law to immigration judge roles. In September 2025, the Department of Defense authorized sending up to 600 military lawyers to serve as temporary immigration judges. The month before, the Department of Justice relaxed requirements to serve as a temporary immigration judge, no longer requiring that individuals served as a former immigration judge or appellate immigration judge, as an administrative judge within another executive branch agency, or as a DOJ attorney with at least 10 years of immigration law experience. While temporary judges are only meant to serve as supplementary capacity to EOIR immigration judges, if the full allotment of military judges are detailed, it would double the total number of EOIR judges.[22]

Shrinking of Legal Immigration Pathways

Since the Commission issued its final report, the federal government has further narrowed or destabilized pathways through which immigrants can obtain or maintain lawful status in the United States, limiting options for individuals in immigration proceedings and creating a pipeline into the deportation process. These changes include the expiration of several Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designations, new restrictions and fees affecting asylum applicants, historically low refugee admissions, expanded visa restrictions, and new barriers affecting employment-based immigration. In early 2025, an estimated 6.1 million individuals had temporary protections for humanitarian reasons (e.g. pending asylum cases, humanitarian parole, Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA), TPS, U or T visa applications, or Special Immigrant Juvenile Status). By the end of last year, over half a million people had lost status, and analysis by FWD.us projects that by the end of 2026 an estimated 2.2 million people will have lost status and by the end of 2028, 3.5 million, or 57% of those protected in early 2025, will have lost protections.[23]

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[20] Anusha Mathur and Ximena Bustillo, "U.S. Has a Quarter Fewer Immigration Judges than It Did a Year Ago. Here's Why," NPR, February 23, 2026, https://www.npr.org/2026/02/23/g-s1-110911/trump-immigration-judges-dismissals-numbers.

[21] Caroline Kubzansky, "Two More Chicago Immigration Judges Fired as Court Becomes Epicenter of Removal Orders," Chicago Tribune, July 31, 2026, https://www.chicagotribune.com/2026/07/31/chicago-immigration-judges-fired/.

[22] Adriel Orozco, "Trump Administration Appoints Hundreds of Unqualified Military Lawyers to Serve as Immigration Judges," American Immigration Council, September 5, 2025, https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/trump-appoints-military-lawyers-to-serve-as-immigration-judges/.

[23] "Losing Status: An Estimated 3.5 Million Previously Protected Immigrants in the U.S. Are Projected to Lose Status by 2028," FWD.us, September 22, 2026, https://www.fwd.us/news/losing-status-projections/.

Amid shrinking legal pathways, legal processes to immigrate to this country have been significantly reduced, and our country's longstanding history of welcoming individuals facing humanitarian threats has been challenged.

Temporary Protected Status and Work Authorization

As of the publication of this report, the Trump Administration has ended Temporary Protected Status designations for thirteen countries: Afghanistan, Cameroon, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Burma (Myanmar), Ethiopia, Haiti, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, among other humanitarian programs. In Illinois, there were an estimated 49,000 TPS holders in 2024, with significant populations from Venezuela (24k), which has since lost status, and Ukraine (22k). Recently, the termination of Temporary Protected Status for Haiti has also affected Illinois' growing Haitian community. In July 2026, DHS finalized the termination of Haiti's TPS designation, effective July 27, following litigation over the administration's earlier decision to end the designation.

The expiration of TPS across impacted countries and related work permits has created uncertainty for workers and employers, with the Associated Press reporting in August that the change was disrupting employment for thousands of people. TPS holders are often long-term members of their communities, many of whom have lived and worked in the United States for years. The loss of TPS removes an existing form of protection and work authorization for people who may have no immediate alternative pathway to legal immigration status.[24]

Asylum: New Costs and Procedural Barriers

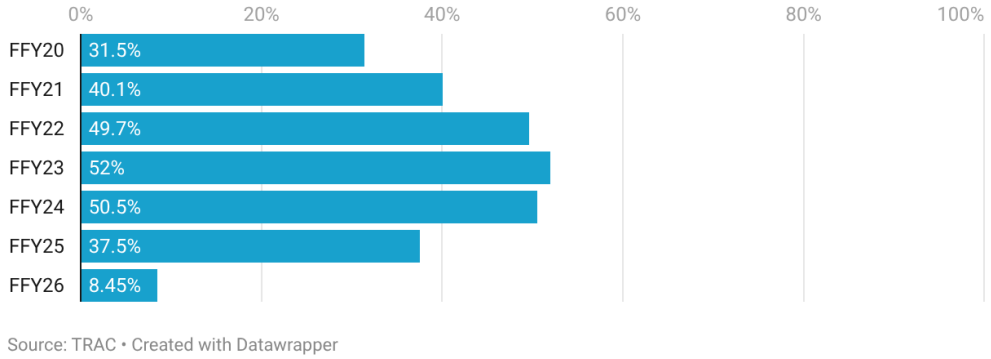
Asylum has become more costly and administratively complicated. For the first time in the program's history, federal law and USCIS rules have introduced filing and annual fees for certain asylum applicants. USCIS currently requires an over $100 annual asylum fee for applicants whose cases remain pending for at least one year, in addition to the initial filing fee. For Illinois legal-service providers, these evolving requirements create additional administrative burdens and risks for applicants.[25]

Additionally, it is increasingly rare to get a favorable asylum decision in immigration courts. In Chicago's immigration court, the asylum approval rate fell from a 14.6% approval

[24]Gisela Salomon and Matt Sedensky, "Loss of Work Authorization Sows Confusion for Thousands of Haitian Immigrants and Their US Employers," AP News, July 28, 2026, https://apnews.com/article/immigration-tps-temporary-status-haiti-work-jobs-trump-8c35f8dd6389185e20dbed0f69fc8f65.
[25]U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. "Fee Schedule." USCIS, October 16, 2026. https://www.uscis.gov/g-1055.

rate in 2025 to just 3.3% so far in 2026. [26] Nationwide, the approval rate has fallen from 50.5% in FFY24 to just 8.45% in FFY26. (Figure 15).[27]

Figure 15: Asylum Approval Rate by Federal Fiscal Year



Refugee Admissions and Visa Restrictions

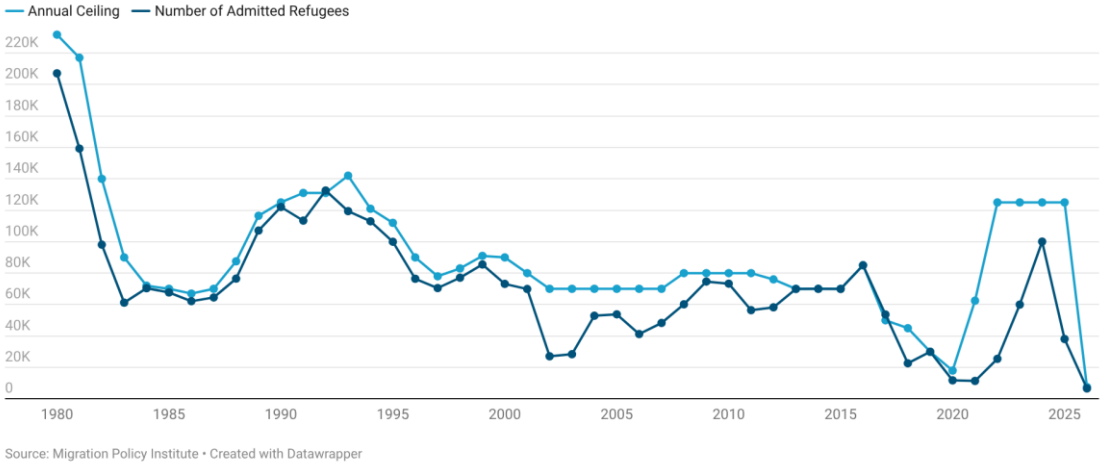
Annually, the President of the United States establishes the number of refugees who can be admitted to the United States in consultation with Congress, known as the annual refugee ceiling. During both terms of the Trump Administration (2017-21 and 2025-present), the ceiling has been set to historically low numbers (Figure 16). The administration initially set the refugee admissions ceiling for fiscal year 2026 at 7,500, with admissions primarily allocated to Afrikaners from South Africa and other groups identified in the Presidential Determination.[28] In May 2026, however, the President issued an emergency determination increasing the FY2026 ceiling to 17,500, with the additional admissions allocated to Afrikaners from South Africa.[29]

Separately, Presidential Proclamation 10998, effective January 1, 2026, fully or partially suspended visa issuance and entry for nationals of 39 countries, subject to specified exceptions. Countries subject to full suspension include Haiti, Iran, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, while nationals of other countries face partial restrictions. The proclamation also eliminated several categorical exceptions for immediate-family immigrant visas that

[26] Lauren FitzPatrick et al., "It's Now Nearly Impossible to Get Asylum in Chicago Immigration Court," Chicago Sun-Times, September 25, 2026, https://chicago.suntimes.com/the-watchdogs/2026/09/25/now-nearly-impossible-asylum-chicago-immigration-court.
[27] "Asylum Decisions," Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, accessed October 21, 2026, https://tracreports.org/phptools/immigration/asylum/.
[28] The White House, "Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2026," Federal Register, September 30, 2025, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/10/31/2025-19752/presidential-determination-on-refugee-admissions-for-fiscal-year-2026.
[29] The White House, "Emergency Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2026," Federal Register, May 21, 2026, https://www.federalregister.gov/public-inspection/2026/5/26.

had previously applied to nationals of affected countries, although case-specific exceptions remain available.[30]

Figure 16: U.S. Refugee Admissions and Refugee Resettlement Ceilings, FY 1980-2026 (Oct-May)



Employment-Based Immigration

Employment-based immigration has also faced new financial and regulatory barriers. In August 2026, DHS proposed an additional $103,265 charge for each cap-subject H-1B petition, on top of existing filing fees. The proposal is separate from the $100,000 H-1B payment imposed in 2025 and remains subject to the federal rulemaking process.[31]

The proposed charge would represent a substantial increase over existing H-1B filing costs. FWD.us notes that current filing fees are approximately $2,225 for employers with 25 or fewer employees and $3,595 for larger employers, before premium processing, and cites DHS's estimate that the proposed $103,265 charge would exceed 1% of annual revenue for more than three-quarters of small H-1B filers.[32]

The status of the $100,000 H-1B payment has changed through litigation. In June 2026, a federal district court vacated the government guidance implementing the payment, and an appeals court subsequently declined to reinstate it. On September 30, another federal judge

[30]U.S. Department of State, "Suspension of Visa Issuance to Foreign Nationals to Protect the Security of the United States," February 2, 2026, https://travel.state.gov/en/newsroom/visas/2026/suspension-of-visa-issuance-to-foreign-nationals-to-protect-the-security-of-the-united-states.html

[31] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Fee for Certain H-1B Petitions," Federal Register, August 25, 2026, https://public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2026-17324.pdf.

[32]"The H-1B Tax Would Price America Out of the Global Race for Talent," FWD.us, September 2, 2026, https://www.fwd.us/news/h1b-fee/.

blocked enforcement of the payment. As of October 1, 2026, the government therefore cannot enforce the $100,000 payment while the litigation continues.[33]

For Illinois employers, universities, hospitals, and other institutions that rely on employment-based immigration, the proposed fee and ongoing litigation create uncertainty about the costs associated with hiring highly skilled foreign workers.

Increased Scrutiny in the Naturalization Process

The administration has also increased scrutiny of people seeking U.S. citizenship. In 2025, USCIS directed officers to resume neighborhood investigations in certain naturalization cases, a practice that the former Immigration and Naturalization Service had largely stopped conducting by 1991. USCIS may decide on an individualized basis whether to investigate and may request information from neighbors, employers, coworkers, and other people who know the applicant. The change does not replace the existing naturalization process but gives USCIS an additional investigative tool for evaluating applicants. [34]

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status

The federal government has significantly intensified enforcement actions against unaccompanied immigrant children in Illinois and throughout the country, many of whom apply for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), a humanitarian status open to children who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected by one or both parents. For months, legal advocates for unaccompanied children have reported severe violations of due process occurring in their child clients' cases.

On July 31, 2026, the federal government terminated federal contracts that had been in place for years to provide unaccompanied immigrant children with legal advice and representation in interviews and courts.[35] Over the last year, these amendments resulted in the federal government sidelining the national network of legal service providers with deep expertise in representing unaccompanied children while seeking to award the grant to organizations not equipped to do this work. These changes have come at a time when many unaccompanied immigrant children's cases have been moved up, leaving children and their legal representatives scrambling to prepare for interviews, and hearings in a

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[33]Daniel Wiessner, "Second Judge Blocks Trump's $100,000 Fee for New H-1B Worker Visas," Reuters, September 30, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/second-judge-blocks-trumps-100000-fee-new-h-1b-worker-visas-2026-10-01/.

[34] U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Volume 12 - Citizenship and Naturalization," USCIS, April 15, 2019, https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-12.

[35] National Immigrant Justice Center, "Illinois Elected Officials and Advocates Raise Alarm about Due Process Violations Targeting Children at Chicago Immigration Court," National Immigrant Justice Center, August 27, 2026, https://immigrantjustice.org/press-release/illinois-elected-officials-and-advocates-raise-alarm-about-due-process-violations-targeting-children-at-chicago-immigration-court/.

matter of weeks or less. This has resulted in children around the country, some as young as 4 years old, appearing in immigration hearings without any legal representation.[36] The National Immigrant Justice Center, a former subgrantee still working to provide counsel to the unaccompanied children in Illinois that they represent, has also reported that clients with pending– and in some cases, approved – applications for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) are still being given removal orders by an immigration judge.[37]

Expanding ICE: Funding, Enforcement Capacity, and Technology

Dramatically increased budgets across the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Customs and Border Patrol are enabling new staffing levels, surveillance technologies, and less-than-lethal crowd control weapons to be considered.

While enforcement tactics have shifted since Operation Midway Blitz, the federal government's enforcement capacity has continued to grow. Since the Commission issued its final report on April 30, 2026, ICE has expanded its resources, detention infrastructure, staffing, surveillance capabilities, and enforcement technologies. The following section details how these developments are reshaping immigration enforcement both nationally and in Illinois.

Expanding Funding and Detention Capacity

In June 2026, Congress enacted the *Secure America Act*, providing additional funding for immigration enforcement, including personnel, transportation and removal operations, information technology, facilities, fleet maintenance, and partnerships with state and local law enforcement. The law appropriated $31.075 billion to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), with the funds available through September 30, 2029, to expand personnel, enforcement and removal operations, facility and fleet capacity, information technology, legal support, and cooperation with state and local authorities.[38]

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[36]"Trump to Accelerate Deportations of Migrant Children in US Custody, Officials Say," ABC7 Los Angeles, April 28, 2026, https://abc7.com/post/trump-accelerate-deportations-migrant-children-us-custody-officials-say/18987953/.

[37] National Immigrant Justice Center, "Illinois Elected Officials and Advocates Raise Alarm about Due Process Violations Targeting Children at Chicago Immigration Court," National Immigrant Justice Center, August 27, 2026, https://immigrantjustice.org/press-release/illinois-elected-officials-and-advocates-raise-alarm-about-due-process-violations-targeting-children-at-chicago-immigration-court/.

[38]Congressional Research Service, ed., "Understanding the FY2026 DHS Budget Request September 5, 2025," Congress.gov, September 5, 2025, https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/R/PDF/R48704/R48704.4.pdf.

New federal oversight findings also provide a clearer picture of how ICE is using these resources to expand detention capacity. In September 2026, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that ICE had pursued multiple detention-expansion initiatives without first developing a comprehensive plan for determining the appropriate size, type, and cost of its detention network. As part of that expansion, ICE purchased 11 warehouses for potential conversion into detention facilities for approximately $1.07 billion. ICE subsequently decided to sell seven of the warehouses and reported more than $20 million in nonrecoverable costs, including security and zoning expenses.[39]

The expansion of federal funding and infrastructure has also translated into a larger detention system nationwide, with consequences in Illinois. By July 2026, ICE's average daily detention population had increased by 71% from January 2025.[40] In Illinois, the Broadview facility continues to be a central site for processing people arrested, with detainees subsequently transferred to facilities outside the state.[41] These developments reflect the growing scale of the detention infrastructure supporting ICE's broader enforcement operations.

Building Enforcement Capacity: Internally and Externally

ICE has also continued a major expansion of its enforcement workforce. In January 2026, DHS announced that ICE had hired approximately 12,000 new officers, bringing the agency's enforcement workforce to roughly 22,000 officers. The hiring surge was supported by federal funding provided to expand immigration enforcement.[42]

The pace of hiring has raised questions about the agency's ability to complete background checks and training at the same rate. In February 2026, Reuters reported that an internal ICE email acknowledged a high volume of new hires and stalled background checks, while DHS publicly said that all new hires undergo extensive background checks and continuous vetting.[43] More recently, an ICE whistleblower complaint released in September 2026 described concerns about the agency's accelerated hiring and vetting practices. The

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[39] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Immigration Detention: Urgent Planning Needed to Avoid Further Waste of Taxpayer Dollars," GAO.gov, September 24, 2026, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-108663.

[40] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Immigration Detention: Urgent Planning Needed to Avoid Further Waste of Taxpayer Dollars," GAO.gov, September 24, 2026, https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-108663.pdf.

[41] State of Illinois, "Illinois Accountability Commission Final Report," ilac.illinois.gov, April 2026, https://ilac.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/ilac/documents/final-report/IAC-Final-Report-April-2026.pdf.

[42] Kristina Cooke and Ted Hesson, "ICE Struggles to Vet Recruits amid US Immigration Enforcement Push, Internal Email Shows," Reuters, February 26, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/ice-struggles-vet-recruits-amid-us-immigration-enforcement-push-internal-email-2026-02-26/.

[43] Kristina Cooke and Ted Hesson, "ICE Struggles to Vet Recruits amid US Immigration Enforcement Push, Internal Email Shows," Reuters, February 26, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/ice-struggles-vet-recruits-amid-us-immigration-enforcement-push-internal-email-2026-02-26/.

complaint alleged that some final offers were made before preliminary vetting steps were complete.[44]

As noted in previous sections, the federal government's expanded enforcement capacity also increasingly relies on state and local law enforcement. Under 287(g) agreements, ICE delegates certain immigration-enforcement functions to participating state and local officers who operate under ICE supervision. As the program has expanded, ICE has also increased its infrastructure for overseeing participating agencies. In September 2026, ICE sought a contractor to conduct approximately 1,000 on-site compliance assessments annually of state and local agencies participating in the 287(g) program, reflecting the scale of the partnership network and the federal resources being devoted to its administration.[45]

This expansion is particularly relevant to the shift described earlier in this report – rather than relying solely on large, highly visible federal operations, immigration enforcement is increasingly distributed across local jurisdictions and routine interactions with government and community institutions.

Expanding the Surveillance and Technology Infrastructure

ICE also continues to invest in data analysis, electronic monitoring, and surveillance technology. ICE's Alternatives to Detention program already uses voiceprint-based telephone check-ins, GPS monitoring, facial matching, and GPS- and facial-matching-enabled wearable devices to monitor some people who remain in their communities while their immigration cases proceed.[46]

Since April 2026, ICE has continued to expand its use of technology and data to support immigration enforcement. In September, ICE awarded a contract for software that allows Homeland Security Investigations to search and analyze publicly available information, including scans of social media and other online sources and both image and facial-analysis capabilities.

ICE is also investing in additional data-analysis capacity to support screening, vetting, and investigations. A new five-year procurement would provide ICE with tools to extract and analyze data, identify relationships among people and entities, and develop investigative leads.[47] The Commission's final report documented concerns about surveillance during

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[44]Ryan J. Foley, "ICE Whistleblower Warned of 'Unprecedented Lowering of Standards' during Hiring Spree," AP News, September 3, 2026, https://apnews.com/article/ice-whistleblower-background-checks-vetting-hiring-spree-e480c4cd35d603537b0274419ae47b55.

[45]Acquisition Planning Forecast System, "Forecast Record Number: F2026074617," Department of Homeland Security, September 25, 2026, https://apfs-cloud.dhs.gov/record/74617/public-print/.

[46]"ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Statistics." ICE, July 24, 2026. https://www.ice.gov/statistics.

[47]"Data Analytic Support Services (DASS) Intent to Sole Source." Higher Gov. Accessed October 18, 2026. https://www.highergov.com/contract-opportunity/data-analytic-support-services-dass-intent-to-so-70cmsd26q00000012-s-a390b/.

Operation Midway Blitz and recommended additional safeguards. Since April, ICE has continued to expand its use of technology and data in immigration enforcement.

The period since April 30 has also seen the introduction of new physical enforcement technologies. In August 2026, ICE was awarded a $16.7 million contract for 6,000 electric-shock gloves manufactured by Compliant Technologies. The gloves, known as the G.L.O.V.E. (Generated Low Output Voltage Emitter), deliver an electrical shock through direct contact. ICE has described the devices as a tool for gaining compliance from people who resist officers.[48] The purchase has prompted questions from members of Congress and civil-rights organizations concerning training, use-of-force policies, documentation, medical safeguards, and oversight. A Senate inquiry into the purchase asked ICE how use of the gloves would be documented, whether officers would be required to activate body-worn cameras when deploying them, and how injuries and complaints would be tracked.[49]

ICE has distributed body-worn cameras to field officers nationwide, with the agency saying officers would be equipped by the end of September 2026. ICE's policy requires officers to activate cameras during specified enforcement activities. However, recent incidents indicate that the rollout was not yet fully implemented by a September 20 shooting in Austin, where the ICE officer who fired the shot was not wearing a body camera.[50] On October 1, ICE issued additional guidance requiring officers involved in vehicle stops to wear and activate body cameras and limiting vehicle stops to officers who have completed specified training.[51]

Federal Immigration Policy Changes and Impact in Illinois

Beyond the enforcement landscape, the Trump Administration has advanced a series of policy changes and directives that target immigrants' ability to access critical supports and services, contributing to chilling effects and making it harder for immigrants to thrive.

The federal immigration landscape has changed significantly since the beginning of the Trump Administration, with changes affecting nearly every stage of the immigration

[48]Kanishka Singh, "US ICE Grants $16.7 Million Contract to Buy Thousands of Electric Shock Gloves," Reuters, August 27, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/us-ice-grants-167-million-contract-buy-thousands-electric-shock-gloves-2026-08-28.

[49] Office of U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen, "Van Hollen Joins Cortez Masto, Colleagues in Opposing ICE Rollout of Electric Shock Gloves: U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen of Maryland," vahollen.senate.gov, August 27, 2026, https://www.vanhollen.senate.gov/news/press-releases/van-hollen-joins-cortez-masto-colleagues-in-opposing-ice-rollout-of-electric-shock-gloves.

[50] Safiyah Riddle and Anna Wilder, "Federal Prosecutors Charge Venezuelan Man Shot by Ice Agent in Texas with Assaulting an Officer," AP News, September 29, 2026, https://apnews.com/article/ice-shooting-austin-texas-wilber-rafael-garcesperez-e3ca63b090ee1b33ee154eecb99e3311.

[51]Ryan J. Foley, "New Ice Guidance Bans High-Speed Car Chases and Sets Tighter Rules for Traffic Stops, a Memo Shows," AP News, October 1, 2026, https://apnews.com/article/ice-officers-car-chases-vehicle-stops-training-ded50fcee99efab90e55e580250ba2ab.

system—from pathways to enter and remain in the United States, to work authorization and naturalization, to access to federal benefits and services. For immigrants and their families in Illinois, these changes have created a shifting set of rules and requirements that can affect their ability to maintain lawful status, pursue immigration benefits, work, reunite with family members, and access programs and services for which they remain eligible.

The pace and breadth of these changes have also had implications for the organizations, employers, legal-service providers, and public agencies that help Illinois communities navigate the immigration system. New rules, fees, eligibility requirements, and changes in federal implementation have required providers and families to continually reassess what pathways and protections remain available, while ongoing litigation and administrative changes have created additional uncertainty about how and when new policies will take effect.

The developments below focus on build on the narrowing and destabilization of legal immigration pathways detailed in the section above, which have further limited access to work authorization, and include two interconnected areas: the chilling effects and uncertainty surrounding access to services and benefits; and changes to eligibility for federal programs and other supports. Together, they illustrate how changes at the federal level are affecting immigrants and the systems that serve them across Illinois.

Federal Policy Changes Affecting Immigrant Participation in Government Programs

Simultaneous with sweeping changes to immigration policy, the Trump Administration has enacted policy changes that limit immigrant's participation in government funded programs and services. These changes will reduce immigrant families' access to health care, food, housing, and other services essential to health and wellbeing. Furthermore, by creating uncertainty and concern about immigration consequences from participating in government programs, immigrants and their family members may be discouraged from seeking services they remain eligible for, further marginalizing communities already living in fear.

The 2025 budget reconciliation bill, H.R. 1, significantly restricted eligibility based on immigration status for several government funded benefits, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and ACA Market subsidies. As unauthorized immigrants were already ineligible for these programs, this policy change eliminates access for immigrants who are lawfully present in the U.S., such as refugees and people granted asylum. As a result, up to 16,000 Illinoisians who have lawfully lived and worked in their communities may lose access to programs that help them afford food, health care, and other basic needs. [52]

[52] Illinois Department of Human Services. (2026). *Changes in Noncitizen Eligibility to SNAP*. Noncitizen Eligibility Changes . https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=177780

These restrictions can affect entire households, even if some members are U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents who remain eligible for assistance. Proposed restrictions from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) would deny assistance to households that include a member who does not hold a qualifying immigration status. [53] This change would force families to choose between housing stability for household members who remain eligible for assistance and living separately.

The harms of these policies are not limited to people who are no longer eligible for services or benefits. The changes create a "chilling effect," where immigrants avoid participating in government programs and services because they fear potential immigration consequences for themselves or a family member. The confusion and fear created by these changes will likely extend to individuals and families that remain eligible for assistance and who would not face any immigration-related repercussions for using those services.

The anticipated impact from the recent changes to the public charge demonstrates this broader harm. Although the public charge rule only applies to some individuals in specific immigration circumstances, confusion and fear produced by uncertainty in the new rule may lead people to disenroll or forego services they are eligible for regardless of whether they would ever be subject to public charge. The recent notice that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid will share data it receives from state with ICE may exacerbate these fears and dampen program participation even further. [54]

This chilling effect produced by the public charge rule change will likely be especially harmful to U.S. citizen and permanent resident children. As eligibility for public benefits has already been significantly restricted, U.S. citizen and permanent resident children living in mixed status households may be eligible for benefits other family members are not. Parents may withdraw their children from programs or avoid enrollment out of concern for immigration consequences for other family members, despite the child themselves remaining eligible for those services. As a result, children may lose access to food, housing assistance, and other supports that are essential to healthy development, despite being eligible for those supports.

Conclusion

[53] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "HUD Moves to Close 'Mixed Status Households' Roommate Loophole Illegals, Ineligibles, and Fraudsters: Pack Your Bags," HUD, February 19, 2026, https://www.hud.gov/news/hud-no-26-015.

[54] Samantha Artiga et al., "Potential 'Chilling Effects' of Public Charge and Other Immigration Policies on Medicaid and CHIP Enrollment," KFF, December 2, 2025, https://www.kff.org/medicaid/potential-chilling-effects-of-public-charge-and-other-immigration-policies-on-medicaid-and-chip-enrollment/.

This report aims to document trends in immigration enforcement and policy changes since the IAC's final report, speak to their impact in Illinois, and highlight the nation-leading response that the immigrant-serving ecosystem in Illinois has built.

Mass deportation is unpopular. The abuses of power and violence documented by the Illinois Accountability Commission are unpopular. According to polling done by the Pew Research Center in April 2026, 52% of Americas agree with the statement that the Trump Administration is doing "too much" on deportations.[55] Similar polling in the Chicagoland area conducted in April 2026 by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs revealed that most people in the Chicago region, including seven in 10 Chicagoans (70%), six in 10 in the Cook County suburbs (60%), and a majority of Lake County residents (56%), said that recent ICE actions to enforce immigration laws have "gone too far". The changes in the Trump Administration's approach to immigration enforcement documented in this report are guided by this well-documented, popular opinion. Each policy change, new tactic, and new technology represent a shift in the Trump Administration's strategy – not to abandon the high arrest, detention, and deportation agenda that has cost our economies and communities, but to advance it quietly outside of the public eye.

Accordingly, the Trump Administration has advanced a comprehensive strategy that uses executive authority over humanitarian pathways to make millions deportable, supercharges interior enforcement surveillance capacity to support more targeted and low profile arrests, expands mandatory detention in to encourage individuals to self deport before their day in immigration court, and changes the immigration court process to make it increasingly likely proceedings will result in a removal order, all while making it harder for immigrants to live without fear. When considered in totality, these changes do not represent an attempt to limit illegal immigration; they are an attack on immigration itself and core values of our democracy, like due process and privacy. Today, unlike the intentionally public spectacle characteristic of Operation Midway Blitz, these actions are largely happening outside of the public eye: in immigration court rooms, remote detention centers, and our neighbor's homes.

[55] Joseph Copeland and Alexandra Cahn, "About Half of Americans Continue to Say Trump Administration Is Doing 'Too Much' on Deportations," Pew Research Center, May 4, 2026, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2026/05/04/about-half-of-americans-continue-to-say-trump-administration-is-doing-too-much-on-deportations/.