



ICE is detaining undocumented immigrants 'left and right' in Lancaster County



SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer Mar 20, 2017

Federal immigration officers are picking up and detaining undocumented immigrants in Lancaster County at higher rates and for different reasons than before President Donald Trump's new policies, according to several local attorneys who practice immigration law.

The lawyers say that while Trump is continuing President Barack Obama's policies of targeting undocumented immigrants who have criminal records, his new executive orders are giving more latitude for officers to detain those without any criminal history.

The lawyers and others say there is a heightened fear among the local immigrant community as it faces an uncertain future.

"It's a different time right now," said Troy Mattes, a Lancaster attorney who has practiced immigration law for two decades.

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Mattes said he visited 11 undocumented immigrants last week who were picked up recently and detained in the York County Prison; all but one of them were from Lancaster County. Among his three-lawyer firm, they've dealt with 20 such cases in the last month, an uptick compared to what would normally be three or four, he said.

"It would never be this many in such a short period of time," Mattes said.

The stricter enforcement — [which has also been reported in the Harrisburg and York areas](#) — comes as Trump began following through on campaign promises to take a tougher stance on immigration. His executive order, he said, targets the “bad hombres,” or those with criminal histories.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested 197 “foreign nationals” across Pennsylvania during the two weeks between Feb. 27 and March 10, according to ICE officials. Those operations have been aimed at “criminal aliens, immigration fugitives, re-entrants and other immigration violators,” [according to a press release](#).

What is concerning to Mattes and others, however, is leeway to pick up those who may fall in the “other immigration violators” category.

Effect in Lancaster

On Monday morning, Lancaster attorney Wendy Chan got a call from someone who said his friend, an undocumented immigrant, had been picked up by ICE officers over the weekend in suburban Lancaster. The immigrant, who Chan said had no prior criminal history, had been pulled over by police and cited for driving without a license. When police realized he was undocumented, ICE officers showed up at the scene to detain him, Chan said.

It was the third time in the past few months that she came across a local case that’s unlike any she’s seen previously in her eight years of practicing immigration law. One of the others involved someone else getting caught for driving without a license. In the third case, a person was detained after getting caught shoplifting at Walmart.

In the past, ICE would normally not target undocumented immigrants cited for minor offenses, or it would at least wait until the person was convicted and then show up at the probation office or at the prison, she said.

“In Trump’s last policy there is a catch-all that pretty much gives ICE the ability to pick up anybody they deem is a risk to the public or something like that,” Chan said. “It is a very general, all-encompassing, giving ICE the power to interpret, to determine what the priorities are.”

“They’re picking people up left and right right now.” ~Troy Mattes, Lancaster attorney

Oscar Barbosa, another Lancaster immigration attorney, said he hasn’t had any local cases recently, but he has seen an uptick in detentions regionally.

In many cases, ICE officers will show up at someone’s home at 4 a.m. or 5 a.m., knocking on the door and then often walking in uninvited if someone answers them, he said.

Barbosa said the officers will often be targeting someone specific but then ask anyone in the vicinity for their legal documents and may detain them as well if they can’t produce them.

Mattes calls it the “cone of death,” and he’s seen it happen several times recently, he said.

“They’re picking people up left and right right now,” said Mattes, who was hired by four of the 11 people he visited in York last week.

Of the four, Mattes said he was able to get all of them bonds so they could be released by the beginning of this week.

Two, he said, are brothers who had each been in the country for at least 13 years and did not have criminal records. But since they were in the “cone of death” when ICE came looking for someone else, they were detained — and later got out of detention on \$1,500 bonds.

The other two each had pending DUI cases, Mattes said. He said ICE in the past would wait until there is a conviction in the DUI case; then officers would pick them up at the probation office. But in this case and others, the men “hadn’t had a day in court.”

In the shadows

Under President Obama, the government deported more people than it ever had before. The difference now is that the priority on criminals has expanded, said Mary Studzinski, executive director of the Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center in York.

Studzinski said her organization annually serves more than 2,000 undocumented people who are sent to York County Prison from surrounding counties, including Lancaster. Since Trump’s executive order, the center has seen an uptick in calls asking what resources are available if someone gets picked up by ICE.

“Now if they knock on that person’s door, they’re asking for everyone’s proof of identity,” Studzinski said.

According to the ICE press release, when ICE encounters other, non-targeted individuals, they are “evaluated on a case by case basis.”

“These regional operations may result in arrests of individuals other than those initially targeted,” Philadelphia acting field office director Jennifer Ritchey said in the statement. “Many of these individuals were criminals, who had illegally re-entered the United States, which is a crime under federal law.”

Wilfredo Seda, host of the Spanish-language talk show “Café Con Leche” on Radio Centro in Lancaster, said he hasn’t heard of specific deportation cases in Lancaster recently. But he believes those who could be affected are taking cautionary steps in case the worst happens.

And on his show recently, he’s hosted immigration attorneys to give advice to his listeners.

“What they’re telling folks is: ‘You’re already living underground. Go deeper,’” Seda said.