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# ICED IN

## *EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

The Actions and Impacts  
of U.S. Immigration and  
Customs Enforcement (ICE)  
in Massachusetts in 2025



**LEAH  
ZALLMAN  
CENTER**  
FOR IMMIGRANT  
HEALTH RESEARCH



# Background

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In Spring 2025, researchers at the Leah Zallman Center for Immigrant Health Research (LZC) met with partners across the state, including leaders at the Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants, to discuss the value and potential approaches of a study and public report that bore witness to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) actions. We co-determined a clear mandate: Collect stories about people impacted by ICE, identify patterns, and share them with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the public.

## Research Questions

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**What actions has ICE taken in Massachusetts in 2025, using which strategies?**

**What are the impacts on individual, institutional, and community well-being?**

With help from our many partners, LZC put out a call for stories, asking community and faith-based leaders, healthcare providers, advocates, immigration attorneys, employers, service providers, and other community members to share what they were experiencing and witnessing. Participants submitted stories and examples of how their clients, patients, workers, neighbors, and family members were affected by ICE detentions and deportation. We collected 100 stories from 86 different sources of ICE actions and impacts between March and November 2025. Data include de-identified stories shared in writing or over the phone with LZC (n=45), anonymized case information shared by lawyers (n=27), and news articles (n=28). We used thematic coding to analyze the data and craft our report, which was released in February 2026.

# Findings

## ICE Actions and Strategies

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### 1. ICE is arresting non-criminals in community.

Being present in the United States without proper documentation is a civil violation, not a violation of federal criminal law. The majority of immigrants who were detained had no criminal background and were going about their everyday lives when they were picked up by ICE. In several cases, ICE went to a specific location to look for one person with a criminal background but ended up questioning or arresting everyone on site or standing nearby in “collateral arrests.”

**ICE arrested a carload of brothers who were on their way to work as roofers, even though they all had either pending Special Immigrant Juvenile cases or asylum cases. None of them had ever committed or been charged with a crime. ICE then shipped them off to Texas and Arizona.**

### 2. ICE is using excessive force, violence, and intimidation.

Our stories suggest a clear pattern of violent actions by ICE agents, including dragging people out of vehicles, yelling at and threatening people, pushing them against fences, twisting their arms, bringing them to the ground, causing bruises and injuries, and breaking car windows. Public statements by ICE consistently report “an appropriate use of force.” The prevalence of mismatches between victim and ICE accounts of arrests nationally suggests a need for clearer federal transparency and accountability.

**\_\_\_ was on his way to work with two friends early in the morning when he noticed they were being followed by three SUVs. When he stopped in a driveway to pick up some tools for his construction job, the three men were quickly surrounded by ICE agents, who pointed guns directly at them. The ICE agents began to strip the men’s clothes off to see if they had tattoos, which they did not. One of the men had a work permit and was let go. The other two had no papers so they were immediately detained and deported within days. \_\_\_ is now back in his home country, afraid for his life because his brother was killed before he fled for the United States to seek safety and work.**

### 3. ICE is creating a climate of fear.

With arrests taking place in broad daylight and in public, many immigrant families live in fear. ICE agents use intimidating tactics and hide their identities. They wear full military uniforms, bulletproof vests, masks, do not always provide a rationale for physically grabbing people and arresting them, and ask to enter houses without the required warrant. Children witnessing their parents being taken by ICE, families coming home to someone missing, and having a loved one kidnapped off the street are all causes of trauma.

\_\_\_ has been living legally in the United States for the past two decades. She was on her way to court when she and her family were pulled over by ICE. Agents did not identify themselves or produce a warrant. **With her son watching, she was pulled out of the car, forced against a fence and down to the ground**, and held in a way that twisted her hand around—all while she told them it hurt and she needed help. Afterwards, she had bruises all over her arms and required a brace.

### 4. ICE is suppressing basic rights and support.

Immigrants are protected under the U.S. Constitution and are entitled to due process. However, ICE tactics suppress basic rights. Stories described detainees not having the chance to provide paperwork in the moment of arrest, being denied an interpreter, and being unable to contact family members or lawyers. In detention, many people were kept isolated, neglected, and/or unable to meet their basic needs. These stories have raised concerns about humane treatment, health, and rights of people in immigration detention.

Nine employees at an Allston car wash, many of whom have legal status and valid work permits, were arrested in an ICE raid. Twenty-two agents arrived at the business, asked employees to show their documents, and then detained them without giving workers the chance to get documents from their lockers. **Some of the detainees reported experiencing mistreatment, such as not being fed or given a chance to shower for several days.** Meanwhile, the business lost its core workforce for several weeks.

# ICE Impacts on Individual, Institutional, and Community Well-being

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## **1. Psychological, Financial, and Health Impacts on Individuals and Families**

Witnessing violence against a family member or experiencing the overnight loss of a loved one due to detention can be deeply traumatic. Families of detainees are faced with hard decisions about whether to stay in the United States, especially when they lose a primary provider for the family. The loss of the primary wage earner in families has caused young people and distant family members to have to step into new roles to financially support their families, while simultaneously dealing with the emotional and mental loss of a parent figure or guardian. Several stories documented Massachusetts individuals with serious health conditions being detained in ICE facilities and denied proper medical care. Against the backdrop of funding cuts to Medicare and Medicaid, some immigrant families have chosen not to renew their MassHealth out of fear that ICE will obtain their information.

## **2. Institutional Impacts in Healthcare and Social Services**

There has been an increase in patient no-shows at hospitals and people opting out of care, as well as an increase in demand for telehealth visits and home delivery services for medications. Requests for therapy have also surged as people deal with mental health issues brought on or exacerbated by ICE enforcement. Healthcare organizations are working to treat exacerbated health issues such as anxiety, trauma, and chronic disease in a system that is not adequately structured to support high quality immigrant healthcare. In the current political climate, healthcare providers are balancing their commitment to medical ethics and care standards with pressure from funding cuts, inadequate staffing levels, and direct threats to their workforce. Social service programs that support the well-being of immigrants and refugees are also being stripped of funding or shut down.

## **3. Community Impacts on Towns, Businesses, and Schools**

Massachusetts municipalities—especially those with large immigrant populations—are feeling the strain of ICE enforcement. ICE agents targeted frontline workers in specific neighborhoods, immigrant-dominant sectors, and in certain workplaces such as construction sites and ethnic restaurants and grocery stores. Small businesses reported a decrease in sales due to regular customers having less money to spend or because their customer base is being detained and deported. Many people have witnessed ICE arrests, while others are overwhelmed by daily news cycles featuring violent detentions and unconstitutional deportations.

# What Does This Mean for Massachusetts?

ICE's actions in Massachusetts in 2025 had real, tangible impacts on our Commonwealth. People who shared stories with us questioned ICE's ability to ignore the rule of law and established procedures, deny individuals their constitutional rights, racially profile community members, and damage and destroy personal property with seemingly zero consequences. A common thread that surfaced over and over again was that the impacts of ICE's actions extend far beyond solely the immigrants whom ICE is detaining and deporting.

## ICE Is Testing the Rule of Law

ICE is testing the limits of the rule of law in Massachusetts by acting with unnecessary force and arresting non-criminals with impunity. ICE's lack of transparency, accountability, and standards to uphold basic human rights means that the experience of immigrants varies widely from community to community and from officer to officer. As street-level bureaucrats—government employees who interact with the public and have considerable discretion in how they implement policy on the ground—ICE officers make numerous choices based on their beliefs, training, and values, including the extent to which they are personally willing to go to detain someone and the decision to arrest or release someone after questioning.

## Fear and Violence are Changing the Climate of Our Communities

Fear of detentions, deportations, violence, and/or retaliation has pervaded Massachusetts institutions and communities. This represents a climate shift in which the impacts of ICE threaten not just immigrant families, but all of us. Bystanders and would-be institutional allies are also affected by the federal government's restrictions of First Amendment rights related to anti-administration speech.

### **Many immigrants are avoiding:**

Work • Education/Training • School for Children • Healthcare Appointments  
Court Appointments • Legal Appointments • Weekend Activities  
Faith-based Meetings Cultural Events • Language School • College Graduation  
Grocery Shopping • Picking Up Medication

## Today's Violence Stems from Ongoing Historical Structural Inequality

Although we have shown that the scale and violence of ICE actions under the current Trump administration are unprecedented and will have long-lasting impacts, we also see today's violence as an extension of historical racialized structural inequality. As we shine a light on the direct forms of violence that immigrant communities are experiencing in Massachusetts, we must simultaneously work to understand and reverse the patterns of structural inequality that led us to this moment.

## Massachusetts Communities Can Prevent and Mitigate Further Harm

The climate of militarization, dehumanization, and fear described in this report inflicts collective harm on all of us—even those who support the Trump administration or still believe that ICE is solely targeting criminals. It also produces questions about our collective safety and well-being. Although it feels difficult in this era of polarization, social connectedness and cohesion can counter fracturing communities and build pathways of resistance and long-term change. One place to start is by revisiting shared values and acknowledging that we are all impacted and implicated in Massachusetts.

Massachusetts is home to strong and effective voices of resistance. In the face of harmful federal policies, state and local policies can counteract, protect, and provide. We see a clear need for state leadership, additional public understanding, collective conversation, and strategic mobilization to create and maintain safety and prosperity in Massachusetts now and long into the future.

## Read the full report:

<https://immigranthealth.org/wp-content/uploads/Iced-In.pdf>



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