

Five Things to Do if a Loved One Is Detained by ICE or Border Patrol

Last Updated on December 19, 2025

In 2025, the United States has experienced a dramatic increase of ICE enforcement and raids in worksites, immigration court houses, and public places such as streets. If your loved one was detained by ICE, or any other immigration law enforcement agency, here's how to locate them, secure legal help, prepare essential documents, and offer support in their time of need. This guide outlines five key steps to help you navigate this difficult process:

1. How to Locate Your Loved One

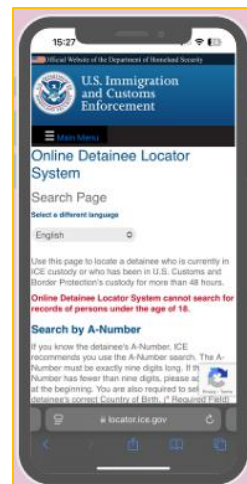
Step 1: Gather and document details about the detention:

- Date, time, and location of arrest
- Identifying information about the arresting officers, including agency name and vehicle license plate (if possible)
- Anything said during the encounter and how the officers dressed (if identity is unclear)
- Important: If you suspect your loved one was abducted by individuals impersonating law enforcement, call the police immediately to report a possible kidnapping.

Step 2: Search the [ICE Online Detainee Locator System \(ODLS\)](#).

You will need either:

- Full name, date of birth, and country of birth **OR**
- Alien Registration Number (A#): Unique 9-digit number assigned by immigration authorities which you can find on official documents from USCIS, or the immigration court, or a work permit. If this is their first encounter, they'll be assigned a new A#.
- Note: *The system may not reflect recent detentions within the first 48 hours.*
- Helpful Tips:
 - Try name variations and check for spelling errors, especially with hyphenated or double last names. *Example:* García Vasquez vs. Garcia-Vazques.
 - Try different date formats for date of birth, like inverting the month and date.
 - ODLS cannot search for records of persons under 18 years. For assistance locating minors, family members can contact the Office of Refugee Resettlement National Call Center at 1-800-203-7001. The center is open 24/7.





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Step 3: If the ICE locator doesn't show a record of your loved one, you can also contact the ICE ERO field offices and possible detention sites. Keep in mind that ICE detains people in multiple locations including ICE detention centers, federal prisons, and local jails. Note: *It is very common for ICE to transfer individuals to different detention facilities across the country, likely without notice or explanation.*

2. Gather Important Documents

Prepare and keep copies of essential documents that may be needed for legal defense. Having these ready can help the attorney build a stronger case.

These include:

- Identification (passport, state ID)
- Immigration documents (visas, notices to appear)
- Birth and marriage certificates
- Medical records
- Prior legal or court documents

Agency	Contact Information (Links)	Considerations	QR Code
ICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Field Offices• ICE Detention Facilities	Search for the ICE detention center or field office closest to where the person was detained.	 
Bureau of Prisons	Federal Bureau of Prisons Inmate Locator	Federal prisons that have been used for people charged with breaking federal crimes, now are also used for people who have deportation cases.	
Consulates	Foreign Embassies & Consulates Contact Info	Detained immigrants have the right to consular assistance. However, if your loved one is seeking asylum and fears their government, contacting the consulate could harm their asylum case.	



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3. Seeking Legal Representation & Identifying Their Next Immigration Court Date

You can check your loved one's status and next immigration hearing date online at the [EOIR Case Status Portal](#) or by calling EOIR's automated line (1-800-898-7180). You will need their A-number and nationality.

Legal support is essential. You can contact a private immigration attorney or a non-profit immigration legal service provider to understand their options in the removal or bond eligibility and request process. You can search for a private immigration attorney in your area through the [American Immigration Lawyers Association](#) or the [Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project \(ASAP\) list of private attorneys](#). The [National Immigration Legal Service Directory](#) has a list of nonprofit immigration legal service providers in your area. Due to high demand, finding help quickly from a legal service provider right away can be challenging. You might also reach out to your local [Rapid Response Network of Hotlines](#) for emergency support.

4. Stay Connected and Provide Support

When your loved one first arrives at a detention facility, they can usually make one brief, free phone call to a person of their choice.

Keep in mind that they may only be able to call numbers they have memorized. Be ready to receive their phone call.

After that, individuals who have funds in their commissary account can make calls from their housing unit. If there is a family emergency and your loved one does not have enough funds, they can ask a facility staff member or an ICE employee for a free call. *Please know that most calls can be monitored and recorded by ICE, except calls to an attorney or their Embassy, which are confidential.*

Once you locate your loved one, contact the detention facility to learn about communication options. Some centers allow in-person visits, while others only permit video calls. If you do not have immigration status yourself, do **not** visit an immigration detention facility in person.

EOIR Case
Status Portal



National
Immigration
Legal Service
Directory



Rapid
Response
Network of
Hotlines



American
Immigration
Lawyers
Association



ASAP list of
private
attorneys





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Physical items like clothes or food are generally not allowed, since detention centers provide these directly. However, items such as legal papers, books and letters may be allowed depending on facility rules. If you'd like to send money for personal needs or extra food, ask the detention facility how to contribute to your loved one's commissary account.




Commissary Account: holds any money they had when detained and any funds they receive while in the facility. They can use it to buy stamps, make phone calls, purchase snacks or other items. If your loved one is transferred, ICE must move the balance to the new facility. Any remaining funds must be returned when they are released or removed from the United States.

5. What Happens With My Loved One's Case After They Are Detained?

Your loved one may have the right to a hearing before an immigration judge. Some people are not eligible for a hearing, for example because of an outstanding removal order (they were previously ordered deported but did not leave), if they are in Expedited Removal proceedings and did not express fear of returning to their home country, or if they were previously deported and re-entered the U.S. without authorization. Depending on the circumstances of the case, your loved one may be considered for *release on bond or parole* while waiting for their scheduled hearing.

If your loved one has questions about their case or legal options, they can call the attorneys on ICE's free legal services provider list using the secure phone line available in every housing unit. *These services are in high demand, so they should keep trying if the lines are busy.* They can also call the American Bar Association (ABA) Legal Orientation Information Line by dialing 2150# from any ICE facility secure phone line.

Additional Resources

National Immigration Project- My community member was arrested by ICE, what do I do? (available in English , Spanish , Haitian Creole)	
Know Your Rights: Five Things Parents Detained by ICE Should Know (available in English , Spanish , Haitian Creole)	
ImportaMi has a great article with information about what to do if you have a removal order.	
If you need additional help finding your A number, check out this ImportaMi article .	