

2016 ICE Home Raids: Facts You Need to Know

What is happening? On December 23, the government announced that in January 2016, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) would begin immediate targeted enforcement to deport a greater number of recently arrived Central American refugees.

Who is being targeted in this wave of home raids? The targets of this particular enforcement action are Central Americans who were ordered deported by an immigration judge on or after January 1, 2014. They are immigrants who have already had a hearing and were ordered deported by a judge. They are not immigrants who have pending deportation cases, or who have never been before an immigration judge. These particular home raids are not targeting undocumented immigrants who have never been ordered deported by an immigration judge. Most undocumented immigrants in Virginia are therefore at no greater or lesser of a risk than they were before these raids began.

Where have the home raids occurred so far? The first wave of home raids was reported primarily in Georgia, Florida, Texas and North Carolina. As part of this enforcement action we are only aware of one reported raid in Virginia, in Sterling. The first round of home raids in this enforcement action is now complete, but the government has announced that the home raids will continue, and we do not know where they will take place or if an announcement will be made beforehand, as it was on December 23.

How is ICE carrying out these home raids? According to reports, ICE officers are coming to specific homes with the names of specific individuals who have already been ordered deported by an immigration judge. ICE states that as part of this particular enforcement action, they are only detaining the persons named in the removal order, and not any other undocumented immigrants found at the residence; however, over the years, we have heard many reports of ICE agents seeking one specific individual and arresting many others found at the same residence. Raids are not being held in schools, shelters, churches, hospitals or other public places. The administration has also stated that it will not carry out any large-scale workplace raids.

Do these home raids constitute a big increase in ICE activity in our community? No, at least not yet. Home raids carried out in the first week of January 2016 resulted in 121 individuals detained, of whom 71 were children. By way of comparison, on an average week in 2015, ICE carried out 114 “non-criminal” deportations from the interior of the country.

Then why were these home raids so widely publicized, and why are they causing so much fear? Compared to ICE’s day-to-day enforcement activities, this first round of home raids was relatively small-scale; yet the government chose to announce them in such a way that seems almost calculated to maximize community fear. We believe that these home raids, instead of being a legitimate enforcement operation, represent a concerted effort by the government to terrorize recent Central American refugees and potential future refugees currently contemplating fleeing Central America. In this way, the home raids can be understood more as an act of government propaganda than an actual strategy to deal with the problems in Central America that have pushed tens of thousands of women and children to leave their homes and take the perilous journey to the United States.

Remember: The best way to combat the fear and terror that the government is seeking to create is by continuing to live a normal life. Try to remain calm and do not make any poor decisions that would have negative consequences, such as breaking a lease, abandoning your job, not sending your children to school, avoiding public places, or missing an appointment with immigration or a court date. You must attend your immigration appointments and your court dates: immigrants are not detained for attending their court date, but failure to appear will result in an immediate order of deportation, possibly putting you on the list for the next round of home raids in this enforcement action.

** Based on best available information as of January 13, 2016*