



Effect Of Federal Crackdown On Michigan Immigrants Examined.

[MLive \(MI\)](#) (2/8, 732K) reports that President Trump “promised an immigration enforcement crackdown when he became president, and he delivered,” and “the impacts have been felt in Michigan, where arrests and deportations of immigrants are up.” MLive adds that “Michigan’s only immigration court is now dealing with a surge in new deportation cases, with more than 2,200 cases entering the court last fiscal year – up 25 percent from the year before.” According to MLive, “the influx of new cases has exacerbated a growing backlog problem in the Detroit Immigration Court, which had nearly 4,400 cases pending at the end of 2017.” The resulting delays “are causing stress for the three-judge court, which is scheduling hearings years out, and for immigrants and their families, including American citizens, feeling anxiety and uncertainty about their future while they wait.”

[MLive \(MI\)](#) (2/8, 732K) says that “in a series of reports this week, MLive and The Ann Arbor News examine the U.S. immigration crackdown under the Trump administration, its impact on people in Michigan and the issues it’s creating for the U.S. immigration court in Detroit.” MLive adds that “the crackdown is real” and “arrests and deportations are up.” Detroit-based Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations “resulted in more than 3,400 arrests and more than 3,200 deportations in Michigan and Ohio during fiscal year 2017.” MLive adds that “ICE is casting a wider net,” and that “non-criminals now make up a higher percentage of those targeted.” According to MLive, “the court system is jammed with cases, delaying justice for both the government and the people affected.” The Detroit immigration court, “which handles only Michigan cases, saw a 25 percent jump in newly filed deportation cases last fiscal year, exacerbating the court’s growing backlog.”

[MLive \(MI\)](#) (2/8, 732K) reports that “federal agents have been more aggressive and less selective about arresting immigrants and pursuing deportations in the year since President Donald Trump took office.” They also have been “far more effective, according to supporters of tighter immigration enforcement, and far more reckless, according to immigrant advocates. ‘Everybody who is deportable is now a priority,’ said Ruby Robinson, managing attorney of the Michigan Immigration Rights Center, which saw requests for legal aid double last year. ‘And there’s limited discretion in who is not going to be detained. Pretty much anyone who is deportable is going to be sent to deportation hearings.’”

[MLive \(MI\)](#) (2/8, 732K) reports that “behind several locked doors in a labyrinth of hallways at the rear of a Downtown Detroit church, Ded Rranxburgaj has found sanctuary, shielded from deportation to his native Albania.” ICE “considers him a fugitive, but the agency has a policy against entering places of worship – unless ‘exigent circumstances exist.’” Rranxburgaj, 48, of Southgate, “was ordered in October 2017 to be deported in January.” Central United Methodist Church “opened its doors to him and his family on Jan. 16, its pastor vowing that Detroit wouldn’t stand for ‘tearing families apart.’” MLive adds that “for years, he was allowed to remain in the U.S. under ICE supervision for humanitarian reasons, because he cares for his ailing wife of 27 years,” but “his humanitarian status was revoked in 2017 as immigration policy tightened across the country, and he was ordered to purchase a plane ticket to Albania.”

[MLive \(MI\)](#) (2/8, 732K) reports that “Joazhino and Natalie Munoz are raising their four children in the Detroit suburb of Lincoln Park, but whether they’ll be able to stay together as a family in the U.S. is uncertain now with Joazhino facing deportation.” According to MLive, “they’re a mixed-status family.

Natalie, 29, the daughter of Mexican immigrants, was born in the U.S., and the children were born here, so they're all U.S. citizens except for 32-year-old Joazhino. He was born in Mexico, brought to the U.S. as a child and never gained legal status, though he's trying now." MLive adds that "since last spring, the family has been waiting for Joazhino's March 2018 scheduled appearance in Detroit Immigration Court." He "was released on bond last spring," but "uncertain how things are going to play out in immigration court, the family is considering all options, including possibly moving the whole family to Mexico, though Natalie says she and the kids may move to Texas so they can take trips across the border to visit Joazhino if he's deported."

[MLive \(MI\)](#) (2/8, 732K) editorializes that "surely the United States must make the immigration court system more efficient if it plans to keep its ramped up enforcement crackdown going," and "as an intermediate step, let's focus on priority cases and not those who've lived here for years without a criminal background." The number "of non-criminal immigrants arrested by authorities in Michigan and Ohio more than doubled in 2017." The "focus has and should be on criminals who break U.S. law and commit serious offenses," and "in those cases, a speedy hearing in immigration court is the best way to send them out of the country."

Some excerpts –

Deportations, despair and big court backlogs amid Michigan immigration crackdown

Updated Feb 8, 3:37 AM; Posted Feb 8, 2:28 AM



By Ryan Stanton
ryanstanton@mlive.com

Donald Trump promised an immigration enforcement crackdown when he became president, and he delivered.

The impacts have been felt in Michigan, where arrests and deportations of immigrants are up. Michigan's only immigration court is now dealing with a surge in new deportation cases, with more than 2,200 cases entering the court last fiscal year -- up 25 percent from the year before.

The influx of new cases has exacerbated a growing backlog problem in the Detroit Immigration Court, which had nearly 4,400 cases pending at the end of 2017. The resulting delays are causing stress for the three-judge court, which is scheduling hearings years out, and for immigrants and their families, including American citizens, feeling anxiety and uncertainty about their future while they wait.

Deportations, despair and big court backups amid Michigan immigration crackdown
Michigan's only immigration court is backlogged with thousands of deportation cases amid Trump's crackdown.

Key findings of MLive's reporting on immigration crackdown in Michigan

Updated Feb 8, 2:56 AM; Posted Feb 8, 2:22 AM

By Ryan Stanton

ryanstanton@mlive.com

In a series of reports this week, MLive and The Ann Arbor News examine the U.S. immigration crackdown under the Trump administration, its impact on people in Michigan and the issues it's creating for the U.S. immigration court in Detroit.

Here are key findings of the reporting:

1. The crackdown is real. Arrests and deportations are up.

Detroit-based Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations resulted in more than 3,400 arrests and more than 3,200 deportations in Michigan and Ohio during fiscal year 2017. Those figures are up 52 percent and 56 percent, respectively.

2. ICE is casting a wider net. Non-criminals now make up a higher percentage of those targeted.

Immigrants who weren't an enforcement priority under the Obama administration no longer get a pass. The number of non-criminal immigrants arrested by ICE in Michigan and Ohio more than doubled last fiscal year (from 487 to 1,101), while the number of immigrants with some type of crime on their record who were arrested by ICE rose 32 percent (from 1,754 to 2,308). In President Donald Trump's first 100 days in office, ICE agents tripled the number of arrests of non-criminal immigrants in Michigan and Ohio compared to the year before.

3. The court system is jammed with cases, delaying justice for both the government and the people affected.

The U.S. immigration court in Detroit, which handles only Michigan cases, saw a 25 percent jump in newly filed deportation cases last fiscal year, exacerbating the court's growing backlog. More than 4,000 deportation cases are now pending in the court and hearings are being scheduled as far out as 2022, prolonging anxiety for families waiting to learn if they can stay together.

4. Odds of avoiding removal from the country are slim once an immigrant is in deportation proceedings.

Grants of relief from deportation don't come easily, and statistically they're somewhat rare. In the Detroit Immigration Court, nearly 80 percent of initial case completions result in orders of removal, either through deportation or voluntary departure.

5. Both undocumented immigrants and legal permanent residents can face deportation, and marriage or children is no protection.

Many people facing deportation, with or without legal status, have spouses and children who are U.S. citizens. That doesn't protect them from becoming a target for deportation since they lack citizenship themselves.

6. Homeland Security is no longer as willing to allow immigrants to stay if they're contributing members of society.

Federal prosecutors previously dropped many deportation cases if the immigrant had good moral character, no criminal record and ties to the community. That happens far less often now. Cases closed due to "prosecutorial discretion" fell by about 72 percent in Detroit Immigration Court last year.

7. Detroit Immigration Court rarely grants asylum.

Asylum is a form of protection granted to immigrants fleeing persecution in their home countries, allowing them to stay in the U.S. In the first nine months of fiscal year 2017, there were 38 asylum requests granted by the Detroit court, while 167 others were denied -- a grant rate of 19 percent, compared to 40 percent nationally.

Read more about the immigration crackdown in Michigan:

Deportations, despair and big court backups amid Michigan immigration crackdown

A day in Michigan's only immigration court, where 3 judges decide the fate of thousands

Faces of the deported: A look at lives torn apart amid immigration crackdown

As ICE makes aggressive push in Trump era, immigrants take refuge

As ICE makes aggressive push in Trump era, immigrants take refuge

Updated Feb 8, 11:55 AM; Posted Feb 8, 2:26 AM

ICE steps up enforcement in Michigan

By Dana Afana

dafana@mlive.com

DETROIT - Federal agents have been more aggressive and less selective about arresting immigrants and pursuing deportations in the year since President Donald Trump took office.

They've also been far more effective, according to supporters of tighter immigration enforcement, and far more reckless, according to immigrant advocates.

"Everybody who is deportable is now a priority," said Ruby Robinson, managing attorney of the Michigan Immigration Rights Center, which saw requests for legal aid double last year.

"And there's limited discretion in who is not going to be detained. Pretty much anyone who is deportable is going to be sent to deportation hearings."

Deportations, despair and big court backups amid Michigan immigration crackdown

He said Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have been detaining people in situations "you wouldn't ordinarily see before," including cases involving dialysis patients and people with mental illnesses.

Ded Rranxburgaj has been living inside a Detroit church since Jan. 16 to avoid being put on a plane and sent back to his native Albania.

Rranxburgaj, a restaurant worker with no criminal history, cares for his wife, who suffers from a debilitating case of multiple sclerosis.

"My dad has been here for 17 years," said his 15-year-old son Eric Rranxburgaj. "He's paid his taxes. He's paid his rent. He's done every step of immigration as they've told him to, and it's been perfectly fine all the time. And then when Trump became president ... he was told that he was getting deported."

Family takes refuge inside Detroit church to escape deportation

The 48-year-old Southgate father took sanctuary at Central United Methodist Church when it became clear ICE was not going to allow him to stay in the U.S. any longer.



Family adjusts to life inside church to avoid father's deportation

Behind several locked doors in a labyrinth of hallways at the rear of a Downtown Detroit church, Ded Rranxburgaj has found sanctuary, shielded from deportation to his native Albania.

ICE considers Rranxburgaj a fugitive, but has not taken any action to arrest him at the church. The agency generally doesn't conduct enforcement actions at "sensitive locations," including churches, unless "exigent circumstances exist," according to ICE.

Sensitive locations also include schools, hospitals, and sites of funerals, weddings, marches, rallies and parades.

Courthouses are not on that list.

ICE arrests at Michigan courthouses in 2017 prompted an uproar from hundreds of attorneys who complained the practice discouraged immigrants from appearing at court hearings and diminished trust in the criminal justice system.

It was one of many issues that have arisen amid the heightened ICE activity, with immigrant advocates calling the agency's tactics irresponsible, and supporters of the invigorated enforcement efforts calling them necessary.

A day in Michigan's only immigration court, where 3 judges decide the fate of thousands

A 26-year-old Belgian engineer, a 30-year-old Honduran mother and a 42-year-old who fled Iraq as a child all faced deportation this day.

How arrests are taking place

Luz Meza, immigrant rights advocate with the Washtenaw Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights, believes ICE has been acting recklessly in some of its methods of tracking and arresting immigrants.

"It's a lot of people being followed from their homes when they leave for work," she said.

"You know, construction workers or landscapers will usually round up their group of people that they usually give a ride to work, and so ICE will follow them until they feel content about how many people they're going to get when they pull them over. So those types of tactics."

ICE would not discuss how it locates immigrants suspected of living in the U.S. illegally.

"ICE does not discuss specific tactics," ICE spokesman Khaalid Walls said in an email.

"All enforcement activities are conducted with the same level of professionalism and respect that ICE officers exhibit every day."

Faces of the deported: A look at lives torn apart amid immigration crackdown

Thousands in Michigan have been affected by the immigration crackdown this past year. Here are some of their stories.

Immigrant advocates also say ICE arrests resulting from traffic stops have been on the rise, including detention of passengers.

"Usually, you don't have to provide ID. You're a passenger in a vehicle," said Robinson.

Maria Ibarra-Frayre of the Washtenaw Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights said many immigrants in Wayne County have been detained by ICE agents at courthouses after being cited for driving without a license.

"It didn't used to be that way -- you would just go to court and pay your fine and they'd tell you not to drive anymore," she said.

Nearly 300 attorneys in June 2017 issued a letter to U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly and Detroit-based ICE Field Office Director Rebecca Adducci, calling for courthouses to be added to the agency's list of sensitive locations.

The letter argued that arrests at courthouses create "a chilling effect on non-citizen victims, witnesses and family members."

Walls said ICE agents do at times arrest targets at courthouses if they've exhausted other options. He said agents "typically make an effort to take suspects into custody in a secured area, out of public view."

"Many of the arrest targets ICE has sought out at or near courthouses are foreign nationals who have prior criminal convictions, pending charges and/or threats to public safety in the U.S.," Walls said. "Absent a viable address for a residence or place of employment, a courthouse may afford the most likely opportunity to locate a target and take him or her into custody. Additionally, because courthouse visitors are typically screened upon entry to search for weapons and other contraband, the safety risks for the arresting officers and for the arrestee are substantially diminished."

Ibarra-Frayre said the rise in ICE activity has led to widespread fear and paranoia.

"We've gotten so many calls from people saying, 'There's a suspicious SUV or suspicious car that's been parking outside my house really early in the morning for the past two days and I think it's immigration,' and those calls are so hard because it's just a suspicious-looking car. There's no marker, no identifier for it," she said.

The group sends out text alerts when there is known ICE enforcement activity in specific areas, but not for every suspicious vehicle reported.

"If we were to send out a text alert for every call of a suspicious-looking van, we would send out like one every day," Ibarra-Frayre said.

Robinson said immigrant advocates have adjusted expectations of ICE focusing on priority targets to: "anybody and everybody" can be arrested.

"I know the memorandums say, 'OK, well, we're going to focus on people with criminal convictions, gangs, drugs, etc.,' but they also say that anybody who ICE comes across, essentially that person shall be detained," Robinson said. "There is very, very, very little discretion in terms of who ICE cannot detain."

Immigration attorneys are seeing more cases of people with no prior law enforcement encounters being detained, Robinson said.

"People who, a year ago would have been let go because they have multiple U.S. citizen children in the household. They've lived here for 20-something years. They're not a priority. They're not the 'bad hombres,' as the administration refers to them as," Robinson said.

"And not only are they being detained, but the default is to detain, and so we're seeing the four detention centers in Michigan where ICE is housing people...essentially being filled to capacity and sending Michiganders to other parts of the country."

That includes jail facilities in Battle Creek, Port Huron, Monroe and in Sault Ste. Marie.

Many more are being held in Youngstown, Ohio at the Northeast Ohio Correctional Center, a privately owned, for-profit prison facility.

"If you're sent to Ohio, your hearing is likely going to be in Kansas City. Well, if your family's here in Michigan, you're in Ohio, the hearing is in Kansas City -- where are you going to find counsel? It just creates a lot of issues in regard to that," Robinson said.

"And because the default is to detain, the detention centers are very full and there is very limited discretion. And even if you're out and released on bond, you will probably likely have some type of alternative to detention."

ICE has been seeking a new Michigan location in which to lodge detainees, issuing a Request for Information in October 2017 in search of contractors and potential locations for a detention center to house 200 to 600 detainees in the Detroit-area.

ICE is also looking for sites around Chicago, St. Paul, Minn. and Salt Lake City.



It was a busy year for ICE's Detroit office and Michigan's only immigration court.

Cheering and fearing the spike in deportations

Juan Romero was pumping fuel into his car when a federal agent approached him at a southwest Detroit gas station and asked for his identification and documentation.

"And they took him," said Gabriela Romero, tearfully recalling the October 2017 arrest of her uncle by ICE agents.

"We're sick of it," his niece said. "... Just losing family... ICE is (out) in the dawns of mornings, stopping outside of gas stations and when mothers are picking up their children from Head Starts, they're sitting outside of Head Starts ... There's been this blanket of: If you're brown, you're undocumented."

"There's no reason this should be happening." - Relative of ICE detainee after Detroit arrest
Juan Romero has been making a living as a construction worker in the U.S. for years.
But he's made some big mistakes.

Two drunken driving incidents, one in 1995 and another in 2014, may have cost him his future in the U.S.

And that's just the way it should be, according to advocates for strict immigration enforcement, who are cheering on the dramatic spike in aggressive ICE activity that began in early 2017.

"ICE's main emphasis has been criminal aliens and visa overstays and certainly prioritizing and removing criminal aliens absolutely does make America much safer," said Dave Ray, spokesman for the Federation for Immigration Reform (FAIR), a Washington group founded by a Michigan man that advocates for reducing immigration to the U.S.

"Because of sanctuary city policies," he said, "criminal aliens that were released back on the streets have already recommitted crimes. If removed, they'd make us safer."

But there were nearly as many non-criminals deported as a result of Detroit-based ICE arrests last year as there were ex-convicts.

Zahrija Purovic, a 50-year-old Montenegro native who lived in the U.S. for 30 years, was deported in November 2017, despite having no criminal record and a pending motion for a stay of removal in federal appeals court.

Purovic, who has three U.S.-born children raised in Sterling Heights, was told to pack her bags and meet ICE agents at Detroit Metro Airport on Nov. 9, where she would learn whether she stays or leaves.

The appeals court had yet to make a decision on her request for a stay, and she was escorted to a plane and banned from returning to the U.S. for 10 years.

Mother deported after 30 years in the U.S.

"This is a good example of the nonsensical deportations that we are seeing," said Purovic's attorney, Carrie Pastor. "She has no criminal record... she was denied asylum many years ago. But we have no idea why, since the court records have been damaged.

"... She is being sent to a country she has not seen for 30 years... ICE refuses to wait for the (court) to make a decision on her case or for her to attend her specialist appointment to discuss surgery."

Purovic suffers from scoliosis and was scheduled to see a Michigan surgeon on Nov. 13.

"Nobody (cares) for the old people (in Montenegro)," she said before her removal.

"It sucks," said her U.S. born son Elvir Purovich, 23. "I don't know what to do. It ain't right."

Advocates for tighter immigration restrictions support the more aggressive enforcement activity, even in non-criminal cases, arguing that the alternative leads to encouragement of illegal immigration.

"The Obama administration spent the vast majority of its time dismantling the nation's immigration laws and turning its back on enforcement, releasing illegal aliens on the streets, some of which had criminal convictions," said Ray. "There are 1 million aliens present in the U.S. with final orders of removal. We have half a million (who) overstayed their visas.

"The Trump administration stepped up national enforcement of immigration laws. The threat of possible enforcement is really the best deterrent we have to illegal immigration."

The numbers

The boost in urgency for immigration enforcement long sought by FAIR, which claims there are 146,380 immigrants living in Michigan illegally, became reality last year.

Detroit-based ICE operations resulted in 3,409 arrests and 3,203 deportations in Michigan and Ohio during fiscal year 2017.

That's a 52 percent rise in arrests and a 56 percent jump in deportations from the previous year, when Detroit ICE agents arrested 2,241 and oversaw the removal of 2,056 from the country.

ICE officials say their doubled-down enforcement efforts aim to keep Americans safe, and that immigrants with criminal histories are their primary targets - although those with no criminal past have been just as likely to be deported as ex-convicts.

"ICE continues to focus its enforcement resources on individuals who pose a threat to national security, public safety and border security," spokesman Khaalid Walls said. "ICE conducts targeted immigration enforcement in compliance with federal law and agency policy.

"However, ICE does not exempt classes or categories of removable aliens from potential enforcement. All of those in violation of the immigration laws may be subject to immigration arrest, detention and, if found removable by final order, removal from the United States."

Of the 2017 Detroit ICE arrests, 1,101 of them involved non-criminals, while the remaining 2,308 were criminal convicts, according to ICE records.

Nearly half of those who were removed from the country, 1,570, were non-criminals, while the remaining 1,633 had criminal histories.

The White House has celebrated the rise in ICE arrests and deportations as a sign of the president's commitment to "protecting national security and public safety, and upholding the rule of law."

Nationwide, from the start of the Trump administration through the end of the fiscal year, ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations arrests for civil violations of immigration law went up 42 percent, while removals resulting from ICE arrests rose 37 percent.

At the same time, Customs and Border Protection saw a 23.7 percent decline in border apprehensions and inadmissible encounters at U.S. ports of entry.

Overall removal numbers actually dropped 6 percent nationally, which the Homeland Security Department attributes to a decline in illegal border crossings and resulting apprehensions.

"These results are proof of what the men and women of ICE can accomplish when they are empowered to fulfill their mission," said ICE Deputy Director Thomas Homan in a statement.

"We need to maintain this momentum by matching the dedication and drive of our personnel with the resources they need to perform at even higher levels. We need to confront and address misguided policies and loopholes that only serve as a pull factor for illegal immigration."

MLive reporter Ryan Stanton contributed to this report.

Updated 8:38 AM; Posted 8:32 AM



© 2018 MLive Media Group. All rights reserved (About Us).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of MLive Media Group.

Community Rules apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.