News

Two men step off of plane onto tarmac awaited by people wearing orange reflective vests.

Honduran migrants arrive on a deportation flight at the Ramon Villeda Morales International Airport, in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, Jan. 31, 2025, following U.S. President Donald Trump's national emergency declaration on immigration. (OSV News/Yoseph Amaya, Reuters)

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Parish and diocesan representatives recently gathered in Annapolis with policy experts to discuss the fluid immigration landscape shaped by President Donald J. Trump's executive orders affecting immigrants and migrant rights that he issued in the first days of his second term.

More than 50 people meeting at St. John Neumann Church received briefings from experts from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc., known as CLINIC, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE.

The event was sponsored by the Maryland Catholic Conference, which includes the Baltimore and Washington archdioceses and the Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware,

all of which encompass parts of Maryland. Several of the state's bishops were in attendance.

An official of the USCCB's Migration and Refugee Services told the gathering, "This week seemed especially daunting," as he highlighted a list of 10 executive orders and actions that address or have implications for migration and noncitizens. An additional executive order rescinded more than 70 executive actions that had been implemented during the administration of President Joe Biden.

One of Trump's actions would have a major impact on refugee resettlement, with which MRS is heavily involved, assisting those approved to enter the U.S. from other countries.

The order, "Protecting the United States from Foreign Terrorists and Other National Security and Public Safety Threats," requires advanced vetting of all those admitted since the start of Biden's term.

It would mean that some whose asylum applications have already been approved, but the people have not begun traveling to the U.S., could be prevented from entering, and would have to stay in either their homeland, where they are unsafe, or in the country to which they were first displaced.

The MRS staffer said that Trump's intention of "complete operational control" of the border aims for not allowing a single person to enter the U.S. without authorization.

Additionally, those who in the past could petition for asylum once in the United States will have to remain in Mexico or another place while applying. However, U.S. Customs and Border Protection shut down the CBP One app, which allowed people to apply for asylum and make appointments for hearings. Those who had appointments found them canceled. Without being in the U.S. and with no way to schedule a review of their case, they are essentially in limbo.

The U.S. bishops have consistently urged bipartisan legislation to reform immigration, he said. Republicans control both chambers of Congress, but the 53-47 majority in the Senate makes passage difficult since Democrats could filibuster most legislation, requiring 60 votes to move it along. The majority in the House is very slim, so that even just one or two Republicans voting against the rest of the party can derail legislation.

Some immigration advocates are concerned that Trump will affect border policy changes via executive action, rather than encourage such changes in the legislative process.

James Brooks, community relations officer for ICE's Baltimore and Washington Field Offices, acknowledged the USCCB's synopsis of the executive actions affecting immigration.

He said that although there is concern that the executive orders will trigger massive roundups, "what we are focusing on is those who are threats to the U.S., known criminals and those who have been arrested."

"One of the things that we are proud of (are) all the arrests that our office has made and has prevented the revictimization of individuals in these immigrant communities as well," he added, "because most of the time when they target someone, they're targeting someone they know, and they are within that immigrant community."

Auxiliary Bishop Evelio Menjivar of Washington, who was himself an unauthorized immigrant when he arrived in the country, asked whether other family members, who may also be in the country without authorization, could be arrested if ICE officers come to a residence or other location to find a certain criminal.

"If there are others in the same domicile and they are subject to removal (from the country), they may be subject to arrest," Brooks said.

Having said that, he noted, if those in the home are victims, for example, of domestic violence, it may be in their best interest to get away from the offender.

Brooks said the enforcement against criminal elements among unauthorized immigrants is especially targeted against those "criminal aliens who have committed violent crimes, sex offenses, gang members, and threats to national security, terrorism. Those are many of the elements that are in place."

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Viviana Westbrook, state and local advocacy attorney for CLINIC, provided a presentation on people knowing their rights if they are encountered by agents from ICE or local police.

"Immigrants have rights regardless of immigration status," she said, though she noted that some may have a higher risk of being deported if they don't have lawful status, have a criminal history, are on parole or have a prior deportation order.

CLINIC provides a "Know Your Rights" packet in 10 languages. The 18-page packet includes information on what to say or do if an agent comes to your home or other location, information about how to read a search warrant or arrest warrant, and steps for emergency planning.

CLINIC also offers a simple card that says, "I am exercising my rights," and has other details in English, Spanish and Portuguese. The card has information about wishing to contact a legal representative, which in immigration cases can include an attorney or a Department of Justice accredited representative. Although not an attorney, those fully accredited by the DOJ can go to court with the person.

She said immigrants can be concerned about whether it is safe to go about their normal business.

"We don't want our immigrant communities to be afraid to go to pray, or to work or drop their kids off at school," Westbrook said, noting that it has happened in the past that immigration officers would wait near school bus stops and after the bus had departed, officers would pick up parents who had been waiting with their children.

She addressed one of Trump's executive orders, which rescinded a policy that had prevented officials from making sweeps or arrests in or near what were called sensitive or protected areas, such as schools, bus stops, libraries and houses of worship.

Westbrook said the policy was rescinded because those who opposed it said it would allow criminals who were being pursued by police to duck into a church to escape arrest. "All the reasons they are saying they rescinded it are not true," she said, because ongoing chases or national security interest were already exempt from the prohibition.

She encouraged parents to designate a trusted relative or friend as a stand-by guardian to ensure care for children if one or both of the parents are arrested, detained or deported. That will help prevent the child being sent to the custody of Child Protective Services.

Before the closing prayer, Menjivar said the current immigration situation is not unlike caring for a patient with cancer. "We don't have answers, we don't have a remedy." In those cases, it is important to accompany people and offer pastoral and spiritual support, including mental health assistance because the situation can be depressing.

"Yes, the legal part is important, and advocacy, but the most important part is pastoral and spiritual accompaniment," he said.

In a joint statement Jan. 27, Maryland's Catholic bishops expressed solidarity with immigrants, recommitting to advocate for policies that protect rights and uphold the dignity of that community. "The church has always been a home for those in search of refuge and peace, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to welcome the stranger and embrace the vulnerable," they said.

"We also commit to advocating for policies that protect your rights and uphold your dignity, trusting that our collective voices will help build a society rooted in compassion and justice," they said.

The eight bishops include Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori; Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory, now retired as archbishop of Washington and currently apostolic administrator of the archdiocese; Wilmington Bishop William E. Koenig; as well as auxiliary bishops from Baltimore and Washington.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.