News



A migrant is detained by federal immigration officers at the U.S. immigration court in the Manhattan borough of New York City July 25, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/David 'Dee' Delgado)

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As the Trump administration seeks to implement its hardline immigration policies, it has increased enforcement actions by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in immigration courts, prompting alarm from Catholic immigration advocates.

Such instances are taking place across the country: New York City Mayor Eric Adams recently filed court papers in support of a lawsuit to stop arrests of migrants reporting for their hearings at a federal immigration building in Manhattan. Protesters in San Francisco attempted to halt such detentions in that city.

Near the U.S.-Mexico border, Fr. Michael Gallagher, an attorney and Jesuit priest and a member of Jesuit Refugee Service/USA's Caminar Contigo program in El Paso, has been visiting immigration court hearings to help ensure those going into their hearings understand their rights, as well as the possible outcomes of their cases.

Among the consequences "of these arrests as people come out of court," Gallagher said, was a woman who had had been told by a judge to leave her children at home for her appointment followed that instruction, and later, as she "comes to court and gets arrested as she comes out, and her kids are left at home and don't know where mama is."

"So that is one of the kind of brutal consequences," he said.

Gallagher told OSV News targeting immigration courts for enforcement actions means the government is in some cases, "arresting people who are complying with the law."

"It's against fundamental justice," Gallagher said.

The Trump administration's changes to Temporary Protected Status — a program for shielding eligible migrants from particular nations from deportation due to dangerous conditions in their homelands — means that there are individuals who first entered the U.S. with legal status who have now been left without it, he said.

A spokesperson for ICE did not immediately respond to a request for comment from OSV News.

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Dylan Corbett, executive director of the Hope Border Institute, a group that works to apply the perspective of Catholic social teaching in policy and practice to the U.S.-Mexico border region, told OSV News, "Immigration enforcement that targets people attending court hearings is particularly troubling, because we're talking about going after people doing everything they can to regularize their immigration status by following the legal process."

"As Americans, we value fairness and respect for constitutional rights, including due process," he said. "This is why from Los Angeles to San Diego to El Paso, we've seen church leaders, women religious, priests and ordinary Catholics showing up at court to witness to the human dignity of those who are our neighbors, our parishioners and decent hardworking people."

J. Kevin Appleby, senior fellow for policy at the Center for Migration Studies of New York and the former director of migration policy for the USCCB, told OSV News, "Targeting immigration courts can violate due process for immigrants, a basic principle of our justice system. Everyone should be able to have their day in court."

"In the area of immigration, due process ensures that those who have a legal basis to remain are not wrongly deported or sent back to their persecutors," he said. "ICE is attempting to short change that process, which should alarm us all."

Gallagher said, "what I'm observing is kind of a real shift towards cruelty, which is very depressing for our country, to become a cruel place." But he said at the same time, "the people I meet down at the courtroom — the Catholics and the Protestants and the Jews — are very much in favor of looking at these people as people, first of all, as human beings with inherent dignity."

In one example of his work helping to educate people about their rights in court, Gallagher said he met a family with a "little girl who was 2 or 3 years old in a white dress, who was waiting to go to court and doing pirouettes downstairs while I'm explaining to her parents that they might get arrested, the whole family."

Despite the circumstances, he said, he was struck by how "she's still a 3-year-old kid and a human being, lovely with a white dress, and a happy child."

Corbett added that as deportations "now begin to hit local communities, we're starting to see a groundswell of statements and actions from bishops across the country speaking out in defense of human rights and advocating for essential immigration reforms."

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.