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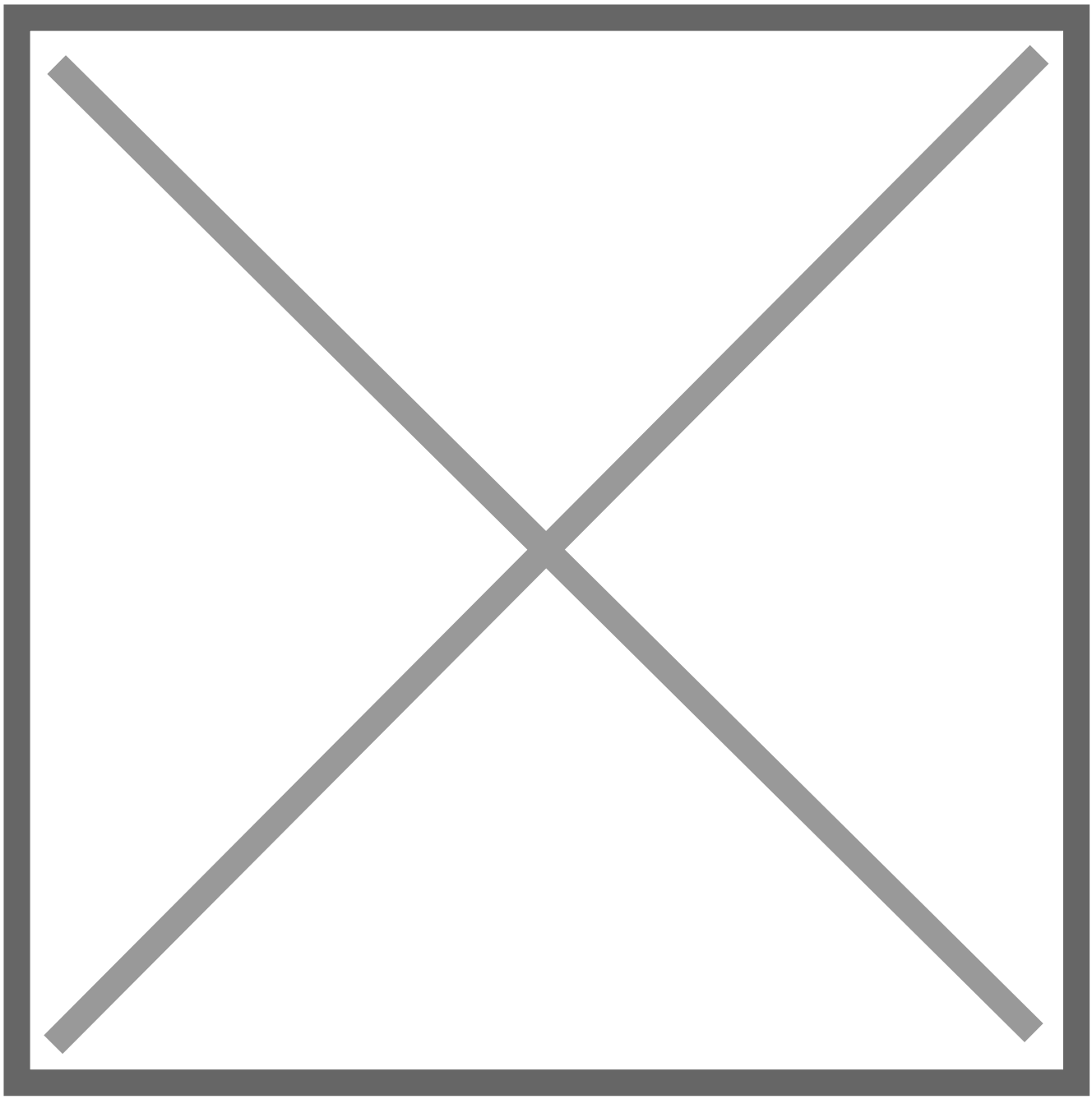

Liam Conejo Ramos, right, and his father Adrian Alexander Conejo Arias, who were detained by immigration officers in Minnesota and then taken to a detention center in Texas, sit on the stairs back at their home after a judge ordered their release, in Columbia Heights, Minn., in this picture obtained from social media Feb. 1, 2026. (OSV News/Reuters/Joaquin Castro via BlueSky)

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A federal judge cited two Gospel verses in his order releasing five-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos and his father, who had been detained by immigration agents in a Minneapolis suburb and sent to a Texas family detention center.

The sharply worded document also included a picture of the child taken at the time of his capture, as well as a scathing criticism of how the Trump administration has conducted its immigration enforcement operations.

On Jan. 31, U.S. District Judge Fred Biery for the Western District of Texas granted the release of asylum-seeker Adrian Conejo Arias and his son Liam (referred to in court documents as "L.C.R."), finding "the Constitution of these United States trumps this administration's detention" of the father and son.

The family's lawyer, Marc Prokosch, said the pair, who are from Ecuador, had presented themselves to Texas border offices in December 2024 to apply legally for asylum, according to CNN.

"These are not illegal aliens," Prokosch said. "They were following all the established protocols, pursuing their claim for asylum, showing up for their court hearings, and posed no safety, no flight risk and never should have been detained."

Biery upheld the father and son's protection from unlawful detention under the writ of habeas corpus (Latin for "that you have the body"), which if granted by a judge provides relief from such restraint.

"They seek nothing more than some modicum of due process and the rule of law," wrote Biery.

The pair had been apprehended by Jan. 20 as Liam arrived home from preschool. Speaking to ABC News as they flew home to Minneapolis Feb. 1, Adrian Conejo Arias recalled, "When we got home, we parked the car and were about to get out. That's when several agents emerged (from their vehicles) and detained us."

ABC News noted the father and son had a pending asylum case, but had not been under a deportation order.

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A bystander image of Liam taken at the time of the arrest — with the child wearing a bunny hat and standing with his backpack next to a vehicle — has sparked outrage, particularly amid the respective Jan. 7 and 24 killings of U.S. citizens Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti by federal immigration-enforcement agents during protests over immigration enforcement actions in Minneapolis.

In his order, Judge Biery included the image of Liam below his signature and added two Scripture citations: Matthew 19:14 and John 11:35.

The first verse references Jesus Christ's words of rebuke to his disciples as they sought to prevent little children from approaching him: "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

The second verse recalls Jesus' reaction on seeing the tomb of Lazarus, prior to Jesus raising him from the dead: "And Jesus wept."

Along with the Gospel verses, Biery had strong words for the Trump administration's hardline immigration policies.

He said the case of Conejo Arias and his son "has its genesis in the ill-conceived and incompetently-implemented government pursuit of daily deportation quotas, apparently even if it requires traumatizing children.

"This Court and others regularly send undocumented people to prison and orders them deported but do so by proper legal procedures," wrote Biery.

The judge also chastised "the government's ignorance of an American historical document called the Declaration of Independence," which listed numerous grievances against "would-be authoritarian" King George III. He cited four of them invoked by the nation's Founding Fathers against the British ruler: "He has sent hither Swarms of Officers to harass our People"; "He has excited domestic Insurrection among us"; "For quartering large Bodies of Armed Troops among us"; "He has kept among us, in Times of Peace, Standing Armies without the consent of our Legislatures."

"'We the people are hearing echoes of that history," warned Biery, who also cited the text of the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution in full on the right of the people to be secure "against unreasonable searches and seizures." It also specifies how warrants are to be issued "upon probable cause."

Biery said, "Civics lesson to the government: Administrative warrants issued by the executive branch to itself do not pass probable cause muster. That is called the fox guarding the henhouse. The Constitution requires an independent judicial officer."

He also slammed the "arcane" U.S. immigration system that might see the father and son "return to their home country, involuntarily or by self-deportation.

"But that result should occur through a more orderly and humane policy than currently in place," Biery said.