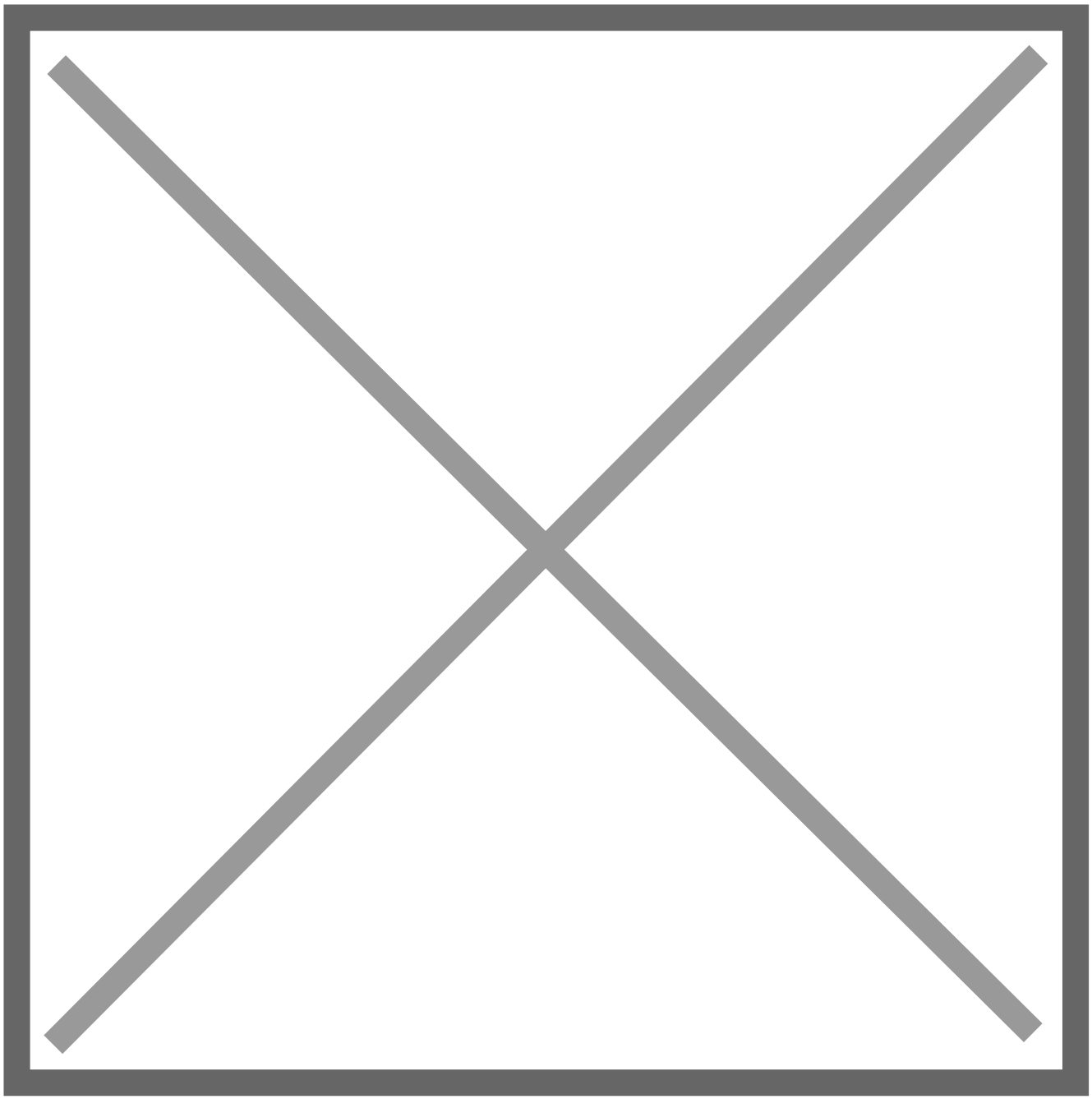
News



A woman sings at Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Takoma Park, Md., on July 28, 2026, during a Mass of solidarity with the Haitian community and those impacted by changes to U.S. immigration policy and Temporary Protected Status. (OSV News/Catholic Standard/Mihoko Owada)

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President Donald Trump revived baseless claims surrounding Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, during an Oct. 12 campaign rally in the state.

In remarks at his Youngstown rally, Trump appeared to allude to unfounded allegations he made in 2024 that Haitian migrants were eating pets in Springfield, saying he was right, but without evidence.

"All of a sudden, they dropped 35,000 people in from Haiti, and it didn't work out too well," Trump said, before alluding to his previous claims made during a 2024 debate. "Remember during the debate I said some of the things they were doing? I was right."

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, "Two years ago, a lie about Haitian families in Springfield brought bomb threats to their schools and fear into their homes."

During their 2024 presidential campaign, the baseless claims Trump and then-Sen. JD Vance, who became Catholic in 2019, spread about Haitian immigrants eating the pets of residents in Springfield, Ohio, were disputed by Vance's fellow Ohio Republican officials, at both the local and state levels.

The same claims about Haitians — an overwhelmingly Christian population with a third to half estimated to be Catholics — prompted bomb threats and hoaxes in the city, local officials said.

In 2025, the City of Springfield sued the neo-Nazi group "Blood Tribe," alleging it was responsible for "engaging in, and inciting, a campaign of harassment and intimidation, motivated by ethnic and racial hatred, against those who supported Springfield's Haitian community in the face of Defendants' racist attacks," and that one of its leaders took credit for the notorious claims that Trump and Vance amplified nationally.

"To repeat that lie now, and to celebrate that these families are being driven out, is not politics," Corbett said. "It is bearing false witness against neighbors. Haitians in Springfield and throughout the country largely came here legally, went to work, and filled the pews of faith communities. People of every political stripe should be able to say plainly that scapegoating vulnerable people for electoral gain is wrong."

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Ohio's Senate race is one of the key competitive races in the 2026 midterm elections. The nonpartisan Cook Political Report ranked the race as a toss-up.

Kevin Appleby, senior fellow for policy and communications at the New York-based Center for Migration Studies and the former director of migration policy for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told OSV News, "I think the president repeating a debunked myth and resorting to scare tactics is a sign of political desperation."

"Hopefully, this time the public will not be fooled by this false assertion," he said. "The truth that should be told is that the administration is deporting law-abiding, hard-working Haitians who held legal status back to a country that is wracked by gang violence, at risk of their lives."

The Trump administration terminated Temporary Protected Status for Haiti earlier this year and has carried out mass deportations of Haitian nationals, among the immigration policies the U.S. bishops have criticized.

The revocation of TPS for Haiti has also led to grave social consequences, advocates for the Haitian community have said. Pierre Damas Bel, a 20-year-old Haitian, died in

an apparent suicide after being fitted with a GPS ankle monitor by the Department of Homeland Security, his family said. Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami, whose archdiocese is home to an extensive Haitian and Haitian-American community, previously called Damas Bel's passing "a death of despair" in a recent interview with OSV News.

Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, urged the Trump administration to end mass deportations to Haiti in a letter to Trump dated Sept. 8. He pointed to an Aug. 23 massacre — carried out by gangs in a village just outside the capital of Port-au-Prince — that left more than 47 dead, with at least 50 kidnapped, with most of the victims from displaced families.

"I implore you to avoid further endangering innocent human life by ceasing the deportation of large numbers of people to Haiti at this time, particularly while there is not an adequate system in place to provide for their safe and orderly reception and reintegration," Coakley wrote.

"The current approach will only contribute to the country’s already deepening crisis, undermining your own strategic objectives for the Western Hemisphere," he said. "Please exercise your authority under the U.S. Constitution to provide deferred enforced departure for Haitians peacefully residing in the United States."

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