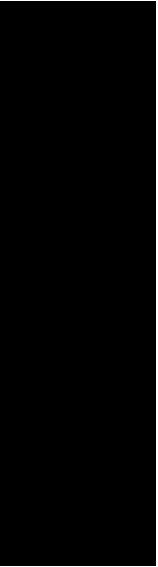




How community leaders, schools and families respond to increased immigration enforcement in Washtenaw County.

BY DANIEL JACOB AND SADIE PALAY



In late January, hours after trudging through the snow and hugging her daughter goodbye as the bus drove away, Ypsilanti resident Lena Smith* received a call from her daughter's preschool before her regularly scheduled pick-up time. She was told that the buses weren't running and that she would need to come and pick up her daughter. She was given no

explanation. When she arrived at the school, three Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents were on the scene, blocking entrances to the school.

Typically, parents are allowed to sign out their children directly from their classrooms. Not this time.

"They had them in the gym, all the kids in one room, and individually let one child go at a time," Smith said.

This came after several incidents of ICE arrests in the Ypsilanti area, where parents were supposedly taken

near schools.

"My daughter is traumatized from it," Smith said. "She's four. I can't imagine being a four-year-old going through this. I mean, what do I say to her?"

The experience left Smith not only shaken as a parent, but deeply frustrated with the larger system behind it.

"What's the point?" Smith said. "What's the purpose? Why are we wasting all this money for that? We have too many other problems going on in America to be worried about immigrants right now. People are starving."

She also questioned the legality of ICE's actions, noting that they do not have the right to be on school property.

"They are doing what they want to do," Smith said.

Smith also doubts the effectiveness and morality of the federal administration's action regarding immigration enforcement policy.

"I know immigrants' everyday lives [have changed] because of this incident," Smith said. "I know people who are immigrants. They have to pull their kids out of school. They have to go and hide. But my thing is, these people work. This country is full of nothing but immigrants. How do you pick and choose who



It has always been a question of how federal civil immigration would escalate and it has happened in beatings, the streets, indiscriminate arrest, tear gas and murder. They erase these crimes in straight up lies.

CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR

*This source has been given a pseudonym to protect their identity.



you take?"

Smith tries her best to support the community and support the immigrants, though it can be difficult.

"We have got to worry about the consequences," Smith said. "We have to worry about, especially if we're endangering people or causing any havoc or anything. That is why a lot of people are just minding their own business. But my thing is, we're seeing it. This is directly affecting us."

However, Smith isn't the only one trying to support the immigrant community. Krystie Linton, another Ypsilanti resident and special education teacher at Community High School, has taken action to help her community feel safe in times when many don't. More than half of Michigan residents, according to recent polls taken by American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Michigan, disapprove of ICE's actions and believe that cities are less safe because of ICE involvement. Linton and others in the Ypsilanti community have quickly banded together, forming a team that has been organizing mutual aid and supplies for families, as well as a rapid-response system to help monitor ICE activity to support affected families.

"We came together at a mutual meeting place in person, and we've just been spreading the word," Linton said. "We've all gone through safety training and what you're allowed to do and how you're allowed to respond."

Linton, like Smith, believes there's a real concern with ICE's recent activity and also notes that not all ICE activity is actually being reported.

"ICE activity gets reported, and when it does, it is hard to know what is reliable," Linton said. "From what I have heard, some government entities are getting around with the language they're using. For example, they'll say, 'We were X many feet away from the bus stop. We weren't at the physical bus stop — we were 10 feet away.'"

It goes even bigger than just groups responding to ICE; schools across Washtenaw County are responding to this new immigration enforcement. At Community High School, Joann Constantinides, an office professional, explained that the school administration is on high

alert in response to recent changes.

“We want to make sure students are safe, so we’re just on a somewhat heightened alert,” Constantinides said. “We want to make sure that if ICE visits our building, we’re following all the right protocols.”

Constantinides has been making adjustments to the weekly announcement released to the students at CHS, warning them not to let adults whom they don’t know into the building. This is especially important given that the high school has an open campus.

“I know it’s been explained to students before — students are in the habit of just letting people in when they see them,” Constantinides said. “I know it must be hard for young people when an adult is standing there to talk to them and say, ‘You have to wait.’”

The local government and police are also responding to recent ICE activity by increasing their presence and engaging with the community. On Feb. 9, there was a sheriff’s

town hall, attended by the Washtenaw Community Police Force, Ann Arbor Mayor Christopher Taylor, Democratic U.S. Representative Debbie Dingell and several representatives from immigration organizations like MIRA (Migrant and Immigrant Rights Advocacy). Participants discussed ways to stay safe, how to know their rights and how to support their community best. There were also important questions raised about the safety of schools, homes and local immigrants.

“We are building systems that help people work,” said Katie Scott, Washtenaw County Commissioner. “With ICE, the fear and the intimidation that is being spread, that is not care. It makes us sicker, not safer.”

She explains that this issue is being addressed in Washtenaw County, not ignored.

“We are here, we are working and we are not walking away,” Scott said

Alyshia Dyer, Washtenaw County Sheriff, echoed a similar message that local law officials do not enforce

immigration laws; instead, they work to keep everyone safe regardless of immigration statuses.

At the town hall, Dingell also voiced her concern about ICE and federal budget decisions, both of which bring light to oversight and humanitarian issues. She noted the urgency of these issues.

“We voted ‘no’ to passing any budget funding [for ICE],” Dingell said. “We have set out a number of guidelines that must happen before any more funding of Homeland Security is going to be done. [ICE] has to be fair and humane.”

Dingell voiced frustration with the federal government’s inaction.

“People have given up their jobs because they are afraid of what is going to happen,” Dingell said. “They came to this country asking for asylum because they would be dead if they were not taken here. The Trump Administration deleted this asylum, and I am sick and tired of people who are holding up a budget.”

In Ann Arbor, a neighboring town

to Ypsilanti, there have been several new resolutions passed to help protect the local citizens. Taylor explained that these new resolutions target ICE.

“The bottom line is that, ever since the second Trump Administration got started, it’s always been a question of how the administration would escalate federal civil immigration enforcement,” Taylor said. “They have done so in a way that is lawless. They have done so in beatings in the streets, indiscriminate arrests, tear gas and murder. They excuse and erase these crimes in straight-up lies.”

Taylor has been working with the city council to pass new legislation and bills. One of these bills, approved on Feb. 2, limits ICE access to city property. As Taylor said, it is important to make the lines very clear about what ICE can and cannot do in Ann Arbor.

“ICE is not welcome here — that’s a general statement,” Taylor said. “ICE is prohibited here is a different

and stronger [statement].”

For Taylor, one of the best ways to protect immigrants is to make it clear what Ann Arbor’s policies are and try to help people know their rights in case ICE knocks. He believes that ICE doesn’t give people — especially immigrants — the rights they deserve. His goal is to protect our community.

ICE arrests, traffic stops and raids are happening across the United States. Taylor believes the impact of federal immigration policies extends beyond enforcement, reflecting deeper social and racial dynamics that shape national identity.

“The goal of ICE and federal civil immigration enforcement is to create fear and chaos, but their underlying goal is to delegitimize black and brown people in the country,” Taylor said. “Its goal is to preserve America and Americans for what they call heritage Americans, or shifting the perspective to a white America.”

Taylor further explains that such actions aim to obscure the nation’s

full history — erasing the stories of Native Americans, enslaved labor and all their descendants.

“[It is] the original sin of America, and that is white supremacy,” Taylor said. “We haven’t redeemed ourselves from it, and it continues to be a source of hate and conflict. The truth is, until we recognize it for what it is, it’s not going to stop.”

For Smith and others in Washtenaw County, immigration enforcement is not a political talking point; it is something that shapes daily life. It is school pick-ups interrupted without explanation, children asking questions parents struggle to answer and families weighing fear against routine.

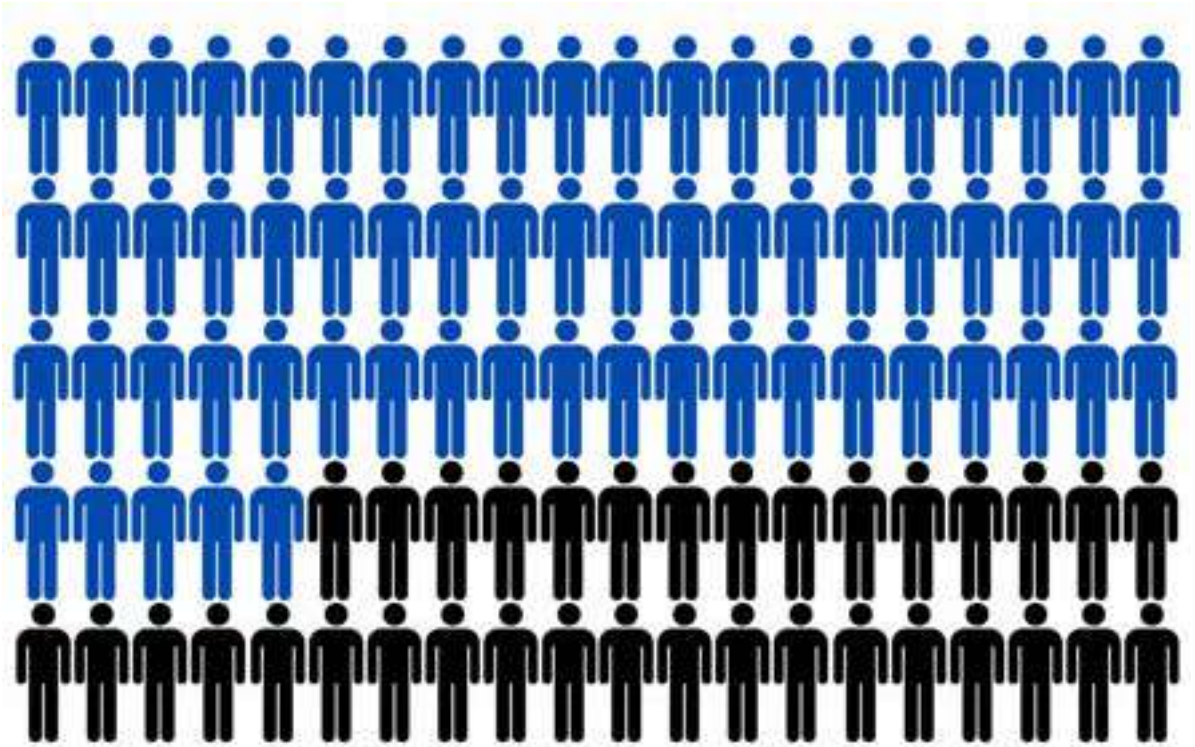
Local officials say they are working to clarify policies and protect residents, while community members continue organizing mutual aid and rapid-response networks. But for families directly affected, the uncertainty remains.

“It’s hard enough to live,” Smith said. “Don’t make it worse for us.”



ICE ARRESTS

NO CRIMINAL RECORD = ●
CRIMINAL RECORD = ●



What’s the **point**?
What’s the **purpose**?
Why are we wasting
all this money on this?

We have too many other problems
going on in America to be
worried about immigrants right
now. . .

It’s hard enough to **live**, so leave
people alone.

LENA SMITH