

Issue: Ethical Immigration Enforcement

SITUATION

Beginning in December 2025, the Trump Administration launched "Operation Metro Surge," a **massive immigration enforcement action in Minnesota** targeting first the Twin Cities and expanding statewide. With **3000 federal agents**, it is described as the **largest such operation in US history**, claiming as its aim to apprehend immigrants with alleged criminal records or visa violations. It **follows intense rhetoric** regarding Minnesota's immigrant population, particularly **the Somali community**, but has been **targeted toward any "suspected" immigrant** (based on appearance, accent, place of work, location, etc.).

FAITH MESSAGES on Immigration Enforcement in Minnesota

***Drawn from the statements made by Bishop Yehiel Curry and the Minnesota bishops (jointly and individually)**

1. Human Dignity Rooted in Faith – We believe **every person is created in the image of God** and is a beloved child of God, **regardless of immigration status**. Our faith calls us to love the stranger as ourselves, to seek justice, and to defend those who are vulnerable. ***Policies and enforcement practices must reflect the God-given dignity of all people.***

2. Grief, Lament, and Moral Witness – We **grieve the violence, fear, and suffering** in our communities. We lament families being torn apart and neighbors living in fear. Lament is faithful, naming what is wrong while trusting that God is present with us in the midst of pain. Our ***faith compels us to speak when injustice harms our neighbors.***



3. Fear and Harm in Communities – We see the **fear and trauma that aggressive enforcement has created** for families, children, congregations, and entire neighborhoods. No community should live under constant threat. We are **concerned by the racial profiling and indiscriminate targeting** of black and brown neighbors and immigrants.

4. Accountability and the Rule of Law – We call for **transparency, accountability, and justice**. The use of force by federal agents must be independently investigated, and violations of due process must have consequences. Public safety depends on trust, and ***trust requires that law enforcement respect the rights and dignity of every person.***

5. Opposition to Escalated Enforcement and Harmful Detention – We believe **excessive enforcement and detention practices harm communities** and violate moral responsibility. Indiscriminate arrests, unsafe detention conditions, and the detention of children are not consistent with human dignity. ***Resources should be directed toward humane and just solutions*** that strengthen the common good.



6. Protection of Sacred and Community Spaces – We affirm that **houses of worship and other essential community spaces should be places of safety, not fear**. People should never be prevented from worship, seeking medical care, attending school, or accessing the courts because they fear immigration enforcement.

7. Support for Refugees and Lawfully Present Immigrants – We **affirm the promises made to refugees and immigrants** who were welcomed into this country. Reopening cases, detaining lawfully present people, and destabilizing families contradict commitments to protection and hospitality. We ***remain committed to welcoming our neighbors.***

8. Christian Identity and Spiritual Grounding – Our baptismal identity reminds us that **we are God's beloved, and so are our neighbors**. We are grounded in Scripture, prayer, worship, and community as we face difficult times. This ***spiritual foundation gives us courage to act*** with compassion and conviction.

9. Commitment to Action and Solidarity – We commit ourselves to pray, to advocate, and to act alongside those most affected. **We will show up for our neighbors with love**, provide care and support, and work for policies that reflect justice and mercy. ***Faith calls us not only to belief, but to action.***

10. Hope and Perseverance – We do not grow weary in seeking justice and peace. Our **hope is rooted in Christ**, not in circumstances. We trust that **love is stronger than fear, community is stronger than division, and justice is stronger than cruelty**. God is with us, and we are not alone.



BACKGROUND

What is ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement): A federal law enforcement agency within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), created in 2003 after the 9/11 attacks.

Its main roles include:

- Enforcing immigration laws inside the United States (arrests, detention, deportation)
- Investigating cross-border crime
- Managing the civil immigration detention system
- **Working closely with CBP** which is **U.S. Customs and Border Protection** (tasked with security at borders and ports of entry).

Federal Funding Changes (2025 Reconciliation Bill): In July 2025, Congress passed H.R. 1 (called by some the "Big Beautiful Bill" and signed by President Donald Trump) provides, among other provisions, **\$170.7 billion** for immigration and border enforcement through 2029, an amount beyond the regular appropriations process.

Major funding increases include:

- **\$45 billion** for expanding immigration detention (potentially more than 100,000 beds)
- **\$29.9 billion** for ICE arrests, deportation operations, and hiring 10,000 new officers
- **\$51.6 billion** for border wall and facilities / **Capped immigration judges** at 800 despite backlogs (& 25% decrease)
- **Billions for state cooperation** with federal immigration enforcement

Funds passed through budget reconciliation include **limited oversight requirements**, giving agencies broad discretion.

Minnesota Lawsuits and Reports:

- More than **80 Minnesotans filed sworn declarations** in federal court alleging excessive force, intimidation, and violations of constitutional rights by federal immigration agents.
- The American Civil Liberties Union of Minnesota reports **700+ complaints** of misconduct by Federal agents in Minnesota, including more than 200 from mid-January through mid-February, 2026.

Main Allegations



- **Racial profiling & wrongful detention** – U.S. citizens detained due to appearance or accent; Stops or questioning based on neighborhood or perceived immigration status
- **Detention concerns** – Reports of detainees denied medication, food, or access to attorneys; Transfers out of state without notice to family members.
- **Use of excessive force** - Tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, flash-bang grenades, and physical force against legal observers and protesters; Intimidation tactics, including following individuals or referencing personal information.
- **Violations of constitutional rights** - Targeting journalists, legal observers, and people documenting enforcement; Treating protected speech or protest activity as obstruction.
- **Court orders violated** – Nearly 100 court orders violated by federal agents in MN by Jan. 28, 2026.

***Federal officials deny wrongdoing and say force is used only when necessary.** Observer videos suggest otherwise.

Impacted Minnesota ELCA Congregation

- **Two asylum seeker members deported** to Venezuela without due process for their asylum claims.
- **One member detained was released in Texas**, not returned to Minnesota. He's waiting for a hearing there that may lead to deportation (hearings have been administrative hearings, not judicial hearings with immigration judges).
- **Another member** was detained and **10 days after the court ordered his release** he was **still in detention**.
- **Member** from Venezuela, entered the U.S. legally in 2024 and was applying for her green card. She has no criminal record and is the mother of a 6-year-old son.
 - After receiving a letter to appear at an immigration office in January 2026, she expected a routine appointment. Instead, she was detained and flown to Texas within hours.

Conditions

- Denied her diabetes medication / Prevented from showering or brushing her teeth.
- No contact with her family or attorney for days. / Shackled at the ankles for extended periods.
- Limited food - went 24 hours without eating.
- Held with dozens of women in crowded rooms without proper clothing or beds.
- Forced to relive traumatic experiences from Venezuela during 7-hour long interview (no food was offered during questioning for her or her pastor who was translating) / Feared for her life and her son's wellbeing.
- Although now released, she continues to feel unsafe and fears being detained again, especially without her documents returned.



Legal Constitutional Observers in Minnesota

- Around **30,000 people trained** as constitutional observers in **77 of 87 Minnesota counties**, including unexpected places according to ELCA lay participants (350+ in Moorhead, close to 600 in Washington County)
- Observers go to where ICE or Border Patrol is operating, and record what agents are doing.
- Videos show that **observers** some distance away **have had agents run up on them, spray them in the face with pepper spray, tackle them, or deploy flash-bangs and chemical irritants**, alleging observers' are obstructing (This has happened even to quiet Lutheran observers in their 70s or 80s)
- Observers **recorded the deaths** of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, showing contrasting evidence to DHS statements.



Sources:

Statements: Observer Patty O'Keefe, MN ELCA Bishops, ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, Chief U.S. District Judge Patrick Schiltz, ACLU of MN
Minnesota News Outlets: MinnPost, MPR News, KARE11 News, Minneapolis Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, FOX 9 News, WCCO News, Bring Me The News, Sahan Journal, KSTP 5 Eyewitness News, MN Reformer

National News Outlets/Organizations: AP News, CNN, NPR News, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Newsweek, The Atlantic, POLITICO, Democracy Now, The Washington Post, NBC News, FOX News, American Immigration Council, CATO Institute, Brennan Center for Justice, TIME, CBS 60 Minutes, Amesty International, ELCA Churchwide & ELCA Advocacy

Other: Pastor & congregants of ELCA immigrant congregation, ELCA pastors, former detainees, asylum seekers, permanent residents, refugees. [LA-MN director Tammy Walhof has read, skimmed, and saved links to 800+ news articles, statements, & press releases; watched innumerable observer videos, interviews, news broadcasts; closely followed social media of pastors impacted or engaged; spoken with various immigrant friends]

Ethical Immigration Enforcement Options

Sensitive Locations Protection – *No comprehensive bills yet / H.F. 3435 addresses only schools*

In 2025, the **federal government rescinded protection for sensitive places** like churches, schools, and hospitals. allowing agents broader discretion. Although **states** may not directly block federal officers from enforcing immigration law, they **do have the authority to regulate** state and local entities, use of state resources, access to state-controlled property, and public safety standards and coordination with federal actors

State legislation to **protect community spaces** should

- 1) Require judicial warrants or authorization to enter or operate near 1) houses of worship, 2) schools and childcare centers, 3) hospitals & health clinics, 4) courthouses, 5) domestic violence shelters and social service agencies.
- 2) Include civil penalties for violations.

This does not prohibit federal action but does protect public safety. States routinely regulate access to their own facilities.

Trauma Support for Children and Families – *no bills yet*

Mental health services, including **trauma or PTSD counseling** is needed for people who have been detained and their families, as well as for immigrant families who have been scared to leave their homes, missing work, and foregoing normal daily activities, **regardless of their status** (even for immigrant citizens). **Schools where children have gone missing** or which have had students learning virtually should be provided the **resources needed for counseling of all the children** to process the disruptions, anxiety, and trauma they have experienced as immigrant children or classmates and friends.

State legislation should provide **resources, funding, and/or counseling** programs that include **culturally and age-appropriate care**.

Independent State Review of Use-of-Force Incidents – *no bills yet*

When someone is seriously injured or killed during a federal law enforcement action in Minnesota, an **independent state entity** like the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension should do a **thorough review of the evidence and situation**. This would fit Minnesota's tradition of independent investigations and responds directly to concerns raised following the recent shootings. Harm caused by "riot control agents" (RCAs) like chemicals and flash-bang grenades should also be examined.

This should be a **focus on accountability and appropriate law enforcement**, rather than on immigration policy.

(Bills as of February 17, 2026)

Talking Points & Sample Ltr: Ethical Enforcement

Legislative "Ask":

Please support policies which

- 1) **Protect Community Spaces** like houses of worship, schools and childcare centers, hospitals & health clinics, courthouses, domestic violence shelters and social service agencies by requiring **judicial warrants** or authorization and assigning **civil penalties** if violated.
- 2) **Provide Trauma Support** for Children & Families which is culturally and age appropriate.
- 3) Require **Independent Review of Use-of-Force Incidents**.

Possible Talking Points (choose 2 or 3, or write your own):

- Humans are created in God's image, and policies should respect the worth of every person, regardless of immigration status.
- Community stability benefits the economy.
- Healthy, educated, and secure families contribute more fully to local communities.
- Protecting safe community spaces reflects compassion and moral responsibility.
- Children's education shouldn't be disrupted by enforcement actions.
- Everyone should be able to pray, learn, and get medical care without fear. Fear keeps people away from essential services that benefit the whole community.
- Schools, churches, and hospitals have their own missions that should remain the priority.
- Healthy, educated, and secure families contribute more fully to local communities.
- Trauma affects entire classrooms, not just individual families.
- Early mental health support prevents long-term costs. Treating trauma now reduces future spending on healthcare, special education, and crisis services.
- Fear and trauma affect citizens, permanent residents, and mixed-status families alike.
- People are more likely to seek help when services respect language and culture.
- Mental health access supports law enforcement and first responders by reducing crisis situations.
- Providing care reflects compassion rather than division, values shared across faith traditions.
- Independent review builds public trust, regardless of the outcome.
- Minnesota already uses independent investigations for officer-involved shootings. This extends an existing standard.
- Independent review strengthens the rule of law, which benefits everyone.
- Reviewing use of chemical agents and flash-bangs protects public health, including bystanders and journalists.
- Oversight is a core conservative principle — government power should be accountable.
- Good law enforcement depends on community trust, which independent review helps maintain.

Example (please use your own words)

Date
Dear Rep. _____ (or Sen. _____),
I'm a Christian and believe that all people are created in the image of God AND are worthy of dignity. I'm deeply concerned about the dehumanizing ways that federal agents have been treating our immigrant neighbors, and those who stand up for them. Here in Lovelytown, we haven't been as directly impacted, but we see the news and videos, and our church has been collecting aid for families here and elsewhere.
While I recognize that state policy options are limited, since enforcement is a federal role, there is some legislation that you should work to enact. First, we need the state to Protect Community Spaces by requiring judicial authorization to enter or operate near churches, schools, hospitals, domestic violence shelters, etc. There should be civil penalties or consequences for violations! We also need trauma support for children and families, which is culturally and age appropriate. This includes counseling for all schoolkids where classmates have disappeared or been impacted, since trauma affects entire classrooms.
Finally, we believe that it is important for Minnesota to require independent review of "use of force" incidents. That is something that our own BCA could do. As part of this, the use of chemical agents and flash-bangs should be reviewed for the harm it causes people whether they are observers, protesters, or people who live near the places they are used.
Taking actions like these will build trust. They could bring some degree of healing and hopefully reduce tensions or divisions.
Thank you! Name Address

God, help us to recognize your presence in the refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers who flee from their places of birth, seeking safety and welcome in our nation and our communities. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

-from Global Refuge