



“OPERATION CATCH OF THE DAY” AND ICE ACTIVITY IN MAINE

Analyzing ICE’s Operational Goals and Our Community Response

A Report by the Maine Immigrants’ Rights Coalition
June, 2026



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Analyzing ICE's Operational Goals and Our Community Response

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Executive Summary

In January 2026, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) launched “Operation Catch of the Day” (OCTD), a large-scale immigration enforcement operation conducted across Maine. Federal officials described OCTD as a “targeted” effort focused on apprehending the “worst of the worst criminal illegal aliens” allegedly “terrorizing” Maine communities. OCTD brought more than 100 federal agents into Maine communities and generated widespread public concern, community disruption, and political attention.

Drawing from ICE’s own apprehension and detention data – obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests from the [Deportation Data Project](#)¹ – as well as Maine Immigrants’ Rights Coalition (MIRC) Immigrant Defense Hotline data, public records, and media reporting, this report examines ICE tactics and Maine community impacts to evaluate whether ICE’s actions during OCTD aligned with their stated public safety goals and standards.

Our analysis finds that ICE agent actions on the ground do not align with OCTD’s stated goal to improve public safety through targeted enforcement focused on individuals with serious criminal backgrounds. Instead, available evidence suggests that OCTD relied heavily on dragnet-style tactics, disproportionately apprehending working-age African and Latin American individuals without criminal convictions. Multiple accounts indicate that ICE detained immigrants lawfully navigating immigration pathways. We also find no evidence supporting ICE’s assertion that immigrant communities in Maine pose an extraordinary public safety threat warranting an expansive enforcement operation. Maine remains one of the safest states in the nation, and immigrants continue to play a critical role in supporting the state’s workforce, tax base, and long-term economic stability.

Given how significantly ICE agent actions departed from OCTD’s stated operational goal, we argue that OCTD was likely pursuing alternative operational objectives. Alongside their official public safety narrative, federal officials repeatedly framed OCTD using politicized rhetoric directed at Maine elected officials and local policy approaches, indicating political operational goals. Although a significant proportion of Maine’s immigrant population is white, OCTD disproportionately affected working-age immigrants of color with no criminal records, who were actively participating in legal immigration proceedings. This pattern suggests that ICE did not primarily reach people because they posed a demonstrated public safety risk, but because they were racially visible and already known to immigration authorities through pending or ongoing legal processes.

Moreover, ICE’s use of masked agents to make aggressive, public apprehensions reflects a model of “performative enforcement”: intentionally visible enforcement activity designed to



project state power, generate media attention, and create deterrence through fear and uncertainty. Rather than pursuing their stated public safety goal, ICE took actions that reduced people's sense of safety. As a result, communities reported reduced school attendance, temporary business closures, labor disruptions, and reluctance to engage with public institutions. Throughout, ICE failed to provide complete public data regarding their actions, shirking public transparency and accountability.

Responding to increased ICE activity, Mainers proved that we keep each other safe. Pushing back against ICE's performative enforcement and racial targeting, Mainers got organized. We formed community watch groups to ensure grassroots government accountability. We formed mutual aid groups and supported nonprofits. Mainers called the Immigrant Defense Hotline hundreds of times, literally looking out for their neighbors. And Mainers keep showing up for each other. While OCTD may have ended, immigration enforcement operations continue expanding and changing nationally and here in Maine. We encourage Mainers everywhere to join organizing efforts to build a Maine where all people can thrive.

Key Findings

- ICE's actions during Operation Catch of the Day (OCTD) **did not align with their stated goal** of improving public safety through targeted enforcement focused on individuals with serious criminal backgrounds.
- The operation **was not meaningfully targeted**, relying instead on dragnet-style tactics; 55% of arrests were classified as "collateral," and **only 6% of apprehended individuals had a criminal conviction**.
- **ICE failed to substantiate its claim** that immigrant communities in Maine posed an extraordinary public safety threat, running contrary to national crime data and Maine's status as one of the safest states.
- **OCTD likely pursued alternative objectives**, functioning as **a political show of force** or "performative enforcement" designed to create deterrence through fear.
- Enforcement **disproportionately affected working-age African and Latin American immigrants** (94% of those apprehended), suggesting targeting based on racial profile and legal vulnerability rather than criminal risk.
- **The operation generated widespread community fear**, reduced school attendance, and caused temporary business closures, prompting Mainers to organize and build community watch groups and mutual aid networks.
- OCTD reminded Mainers that **organizing is good for us and good for our state**. Now, we must pivot from emergency response to building durable public infrastructure.



Methods

This report draws on multiple quantitative and qualitative data sources to examine Operation Catch of the Day (OCTD) and broader patterns of immigration enforcement in Maine. MIRC conducted primary analysis using individual-level Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) apprehension and detention data obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and processed by the [Deportation Data Project](#). The dataset used for this report covers the period from October 2022 through early March 2026.

The report also incorporates data MIRC collected through the Maine Immigrant Defense Hotline (the Hotline), including: reports of ICE sightings, detentions, community impacts, and enforcement-related community disruptions. Hotline data covers the period from October 2025, when the Hotline launched, through April 2026. We supplement our findings with public statements, local reporting, and third-party documentation related to immigration enforcement activity in Maine during and surrounding OCTD.

Data analysis focused on identifying enforcement patterns, demographic trends, operational characteristics, and reported community impacts associated with recent immigration enforcement activity in Maine. Particular attention was given to apprehension patterns, collateral arrests, criminality classifications, and the relationship between publicly stated enforcement objectives and observed enforcement outcomes.

Additional information regarding data formatting, cleaning, visualization, and methodology is available through [LighthouseME.org](#), including access to the project dashboard, interactive mapping tools, and raw datasets. Readers are encouraged to explore these resources for additional context and ongoing data updates.

This report acknowledges several limitations. ICE apprehension and detention data contain inconsistencies, repeated errors, and large “unknown” sections of data, particularly regarding immigration status and criminality categories. In addition, data for 2026 reflects only the first two full months (analysis ending 2/28), as the report was prepared shortly after the conclusion of Quarter 1. As a result, findings referencing 2026 should be interpreted as preliminary and may not be directly comparable to full-year reporting periods from prior years.

Introduction

Immigration enforcement has long been present in Maine due to the state's extensive border with Canada. Federal immigration agencies, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), have operated throughout Maine for decades as part of the broader national immigration system.

Since 2025, the second Trump Administration has dramatically expanded immigration enforcement authority and funding while simultaneously making sweeping policy changes that affect asylum access, humanitarian protections, work authorization processes, and deportation priorities. Utilizing their increased authority and funding, federal officials launched a series of highly visible immigration enforcement operations across multiple states in 2025 and 2026. These operations—framed in both political and public safety terms—increased the visibility of immigration enforcement nationally and played into polarized cultural and political debates on immigration in the United States.

On January 21, 2026, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and ICE announced the launch of “Operation Catch of the Day” (OCTD), a large-scale immigration enforcement operation conducted across Maine. **Federal officials stated that OCTD sought to apprehend the “worst of the worst criminal illegal aliens” allegedly “terrorizing” Maine communities.** Over the course of OCTD, more than 100 armed federal agents conducted enforcement actions in neighborhoods, roadways, workplaces, and public spaces throughout the state. These actions targeted Maine's relatively small, economically significant, and well-integrated immigrant communities, who play a critical role in Maine's community and economy.

In turn, OCTD generated widespread public attention and prompted strong reactions from local officials, immigrant communities, schools, employers, advocacy organizations, and residents across Maine.

This report examines ICE tactics and Maine community impacts to evaluate whether ICE's actions during OCTD aligned with their stated public safety goals and DHS standards. To understand ICE tactics and community impacts during OCTD, we draw on ICE's own immigration apprehension and detention data, which was obtained and processed by the [Deportation Data Project](#) through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and analyzed by the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC). We also utilize information collected through the MIRC Immigrant Defense Hotline (Hotline), public statements, and media reporting. The report aims to provide a grounded analysis of OCTD that informs public understanding of immigration enforcement activity in Maine and the policy questions that accompany it.

We find that ICE tactics during OCTD do not align with their stated enforcement goals and DHS standards. The Operation was not meaningfully targeted, as shown by reliance on collateral arrests, uncontrolled public-facing tactics, and limited communication with Maine officials. OCTD did not primarily apprehend the “worst of the worst,” as shown by the large share of incomplete criminality data, as well as apprehension of people with no criminal convictions—including children and people engaged in immigration processes. Finally, ICE did not substantiate its claim that immigrants were



terrorizing Maine communities. **Instead, OCTD functioned as performative enforcement targeting legally vulnerable, racial communities, in part responding to disagreements with state/ local policymaking.** Deploying armed agents, en masse, towards performative and political ends raises serious concerns regarding our civil liberties, economic stability, government transparency, public accountability, and the relationship between federal immigration enforcement and local control.

Background

Public narratives about immigration in America often rely on broad assumptions that do not reflect Maine’s demographic, economic, and immigration realities. In the sections below, we highlight key facts regarding Maine immigrant communities, immigrant contributions to the state, and sweeping changes to immigration and enforcement that impact how OCTD was interpreted locally.

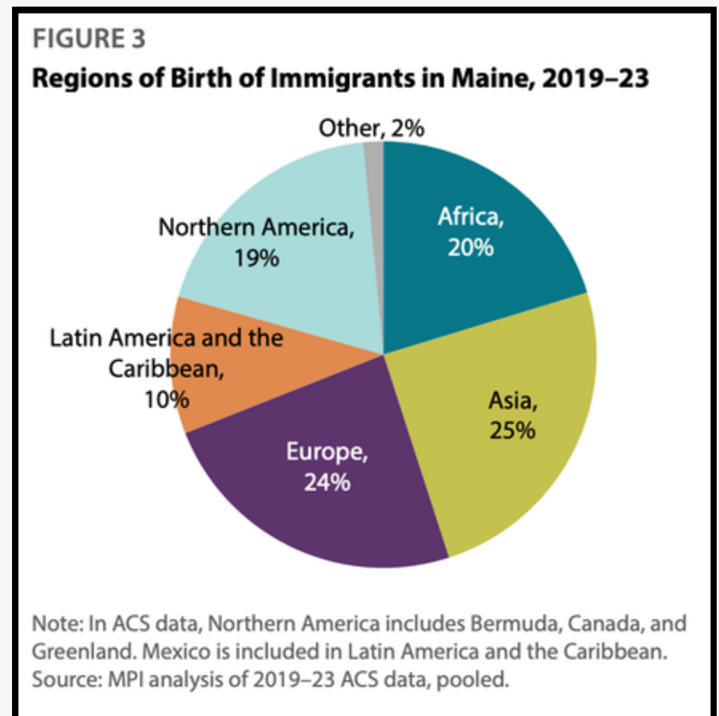
Profile of Immigration in Maine

Understanding Operation Catch of the Day requires first understanding the characteristics of Maine’s immigrant population. Data from the [Migration Policy Institute](#)² on Maine’s immigrant profile provides important context for evaluating recent immigration enforcement activity in the state.

A Small, Growing, and Diverse Community

Between 1990 and 2023, Maine’s immigrant population grew from approximately 36,300 to 53,400 residents, a meaningful increase for the state but still only 0.1 percent of the national immigrant population. Maine’s immigrant

communities are also racially and geographically diverse, with a larger share of immigrants from North America and Africa, a smaller share from Latin America, and nearly half identifying as white. These patterns reflect Maine’s distinct mix of refugee resettlement, humanitarian migration, labor needs, and long-established cross-border migration.



Both Well Established and Newcomers

Immigrant communities in Maine also include both long-established residents and more recent arrivals. Between 2019 and 2023, nearly half of immigrants living in Maine had resided in the United States for 20 years or more.

Approximately one-third had lived in the country for fewer than 10 years. These trends indicate that Maine’s immigrant population includes substantial numbers of individuals and families with long-term ties to local communities, schools, workplaces, and institutions throughout the state.

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Language and Education Proficiency

Immigrants in Maine demonstrate relatively high levels of English proficiency and educational attainment. Approximately 75% of immigrants in Maine report speaking English "very well." Educational attainment rates among immigrant populations are also significant, particularly among immigrant men, of whom approximately 43% hold a bachelor's degree or higher (compared to 32% of U.S.-born men). These indicators reflect substantial social and economic integration within Maine communities and labor markets.

Taken together, available demographic data present a picture of Maine's immigrant population as relatively small, diverse, and increasingly rooted within communities across the state. Many immigrants in Maine have lived in the United States for extended periods of time, participate actively in local institutions and labor markets, and maintain lawful or legally protected immigration statuses. These demographic patterns run contrary to recent federal claims regarding immigrant criminality and public safety threats in Maine. They also help illustrate the broader role immigrants play in supporting Maine's communities, workforce, and long-term economic stability.

Contributions of Immigrants in Maine

Immigrants are essential to Maine's economic stability, workforce sustainability, and long-term prosperity. Policies impacting Maine immigrant communities inevitably impact Maine as a whole.

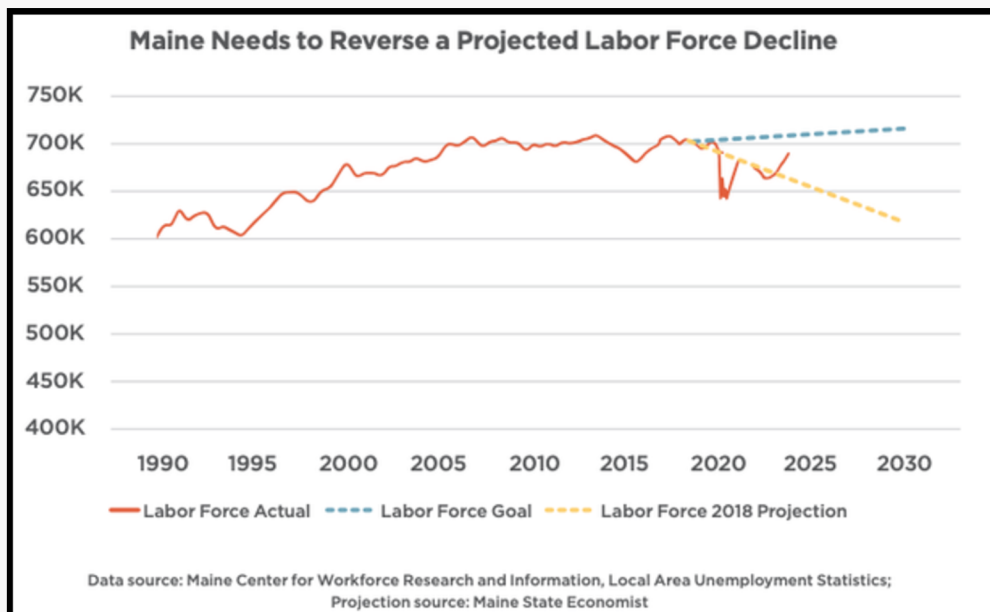
Workforce Stability

Maine has the oldest population in the country. As Baby Boomers age out of the workforce and the state's birth rate continues to decline, Maine faces a serious and growing workforce challenge. The Maine Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) projects that Maine's working-age population, defined as residents ages 20 to 64, will decline by 5.3% from 2020 to 2030.³ Already, Maine employers identify workforce availability as one of their most pressing challenges. If left unaddressed, this decline will contribute to unfilled jobs, reduced service availability, slower economic growth, and higher costs for residents and businesses.

To avoid a workforce shortage, Maine DECD has estimated that the state must add 75,000 people by 2030.⁴ The Maine Development Foundation and the Maine State Chamber of Commerce⁵ know that Immigrants are central to this goal, pointing out:

"We need to grow our population and workforce to grow our economy, and we need to look beyond our borders and attract people from other states and countries...we need to be receptive to the fact that many of the people...will look different than most of us and have different backgrounds and cultures."





Economic contributions of Work Permit Holders

Maine's economy is strengthened when immigrants are authorized to work while navigating humanitarian immigration processes. Maine's approximately 5,000 working asylum applicants support key sectors of Maine's economy that can struggle to find employees, including construction, hospitality, food service, and health care. Through work, asylum applicant workers contribute an estimated **\$203 million in annual income to the local economy**.⁶ This includes \$5 million in federal and payroll taxes and \$23 million in state and local taxes. Work-authorized immigrants help businesses remain open, allow employers to meet demand, and contribute to the tax base that supports public services used by all Maine residents.

Economic Contributions of Undocumented Mainers

Undocumented Mainers⁷ contribute to our economy and public revenue. Rather than a fiscal burden, available data shows us that undocumented Mainers pay approximately \$15.6 million in state and local taxes through income, sales, excise, and property taxes. Their effective state and local tax rate is estimated at 8.9 %, which is similar to the **average tax rate**⁸ paid by Mainers at comparable income levels.

While undocumented Mainers contribute taxes to public programs, they are excluded from accessing many public programs themselves.

Job Creation

Anti-immigrant rhetoric often claims that removing immigrants will improve employment opportunities for U.S.-born workers. **Economic evidence**,⁹ however, does not support that assumption. Immigrants contribute to local economies not only as workers, but also as consumers, taxpayers, tenants, homeowners, entrepreneurs, and community members. Their spending increases demand for goods and services, which in turn supports business activity and job creation.

Research examining¹⁰ immigration enforcement between 2008 and 2013 found that communities with higher levels of immigrant removals experienced declines in wages and employment among U.S.-born workers. This finding is consistent with the broader economic reality that immigrant workers do not simply occupy jobs; they help sustain the economic activity that makes additional employment possible.

In sum, the evidence shows that immigrants are not a drain on Maine's economy; they are essential to maintaining an economy where all Mainers can thrive. Immigrants help stabilize Maine's declining workforce, [create more jobs](#),¹¹ support key industries, and contribute substantially through taxes and spending. At a time when Maine must confront long-term demographic and workforce challenges, immigrant communities are central to the state's future.

Recent Immigration and Enforcement Policy Changes

MIRC supports the goal for an immigration system that is efficient, accessible, humane, and consistent with public safety. In practice, however, the current immigration system often fails to meet these standards. *Rather than resolving longstanding problems, recent federal policy changes have made the immigration process more difficult to access, more difficult to navigate, and more punitive* for immigrants who are already participating in lawful or legally recognized

processes. These changes shape our interpretation of both the OCTD strategy and impacted how Mainers experienced the operation in real time.

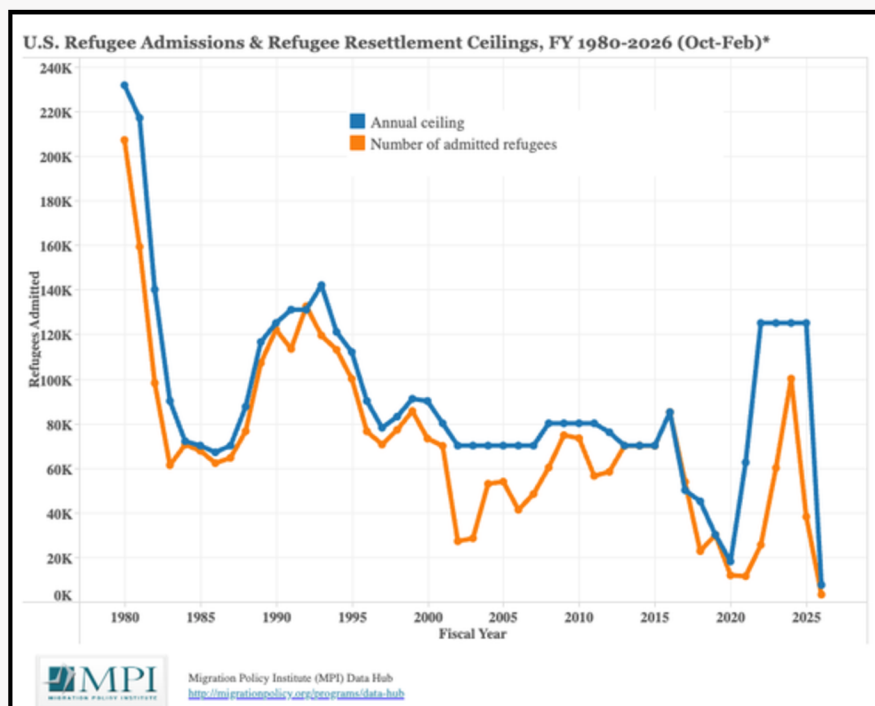
Federal Policy Changes Made the Immigration System More Inaccessible, Inefficient, and Inhumane

Recent federal policy changes have made it harder for immigrants to access legal immigration pathways and maintain their legal status. The federal administration broadly restricted legal immigration access by [adding new fees for asylum applications](#),¹² [reducing refugee admissions by 94%](#),¹³ and [revoking or destabilizing humanitarian protections](#)¹⁴ for certain populations. The Federal administration has made legal immigration status harder to maintain by pushing to [revoke people's citizenship](#),¹⁵ attempting to [end birthright citizenship](#),¹⁶ and [pressuring judges to increase deportations](#).¹⁷ These policy shifts have added even more obstacles to immigration pathways.

Many immigrants move through complex legal

processes that can take years. When the federal government changes eligibility rules, increases fees, shortens renewal periods, or removes automatic protections, *it can push people from lawful or legally recognized status into legal uncertainty through no meaningful fault of their own.*

The federal administration has also made the immigration system less efficient. Federal policies have made the [work permit renewal processes more frequent, expensive, and confusing](#).¹⁸ By adding a \$550 work permit application fee (there was



previously no fee), the federal administration has made access to work less affordable. Moreover, by [removing automatic work permit extensions](#)¹⁹ and shortening renewal windows, federal policy changes increase the chance that people will lose their work authorization through procedural errors and delays. [Revetting refugees](#)²⁰ is another example of inefficiency, as these people have already gone through multilayered security screenings. ***These changes harm immigrants, employers, and local economies by creating unnecessary instability in workplaces already affected by labor shortages.***

At the same time, recent policy changes have made the [immigration system more punitive and less humane](#).²¹ The federal administration [stripped access for some lawfully present immigrants](#) to health and nutrition programs like SNAP (food stamps), the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and Medicaid. Policy changes have also [removed access to the Child Tax Credit](#)²² for some immigrant families. These changes amount to taxation without representation, as immigrants [contribute significant tax dollars to these programs](#)²³ but receive no benefits.

In summary, federal policy changes have not created a more orderly immigration system. Instead, they have [made legal immigration status more difficult to access](#)²⁴ and maintain. ***These policies push people from lawful or legally recognized status into legal uncertainty through no meaningful fault of their own.*** At the same time, the federal government has removed access to health and nutrition benefits, destabilizing immigrant families and risking children’s welfare.

What programs and duties are immigrants eligible for?

Eligibility assuming applicant meets all standard program requirements.


Waiting period before eligible: 5 5 years 0.5 190 days Changed by 2025 legislation

Services	Citizen	Green card	Refugees & asylees	DACA	Non-tourist visa	Asylum applicant	Unauthorized
Social Security	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	No
SSI	Yes	Yes 5	Yes	No	No	No	No
Medicare	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Medicaid	Yes	Yes 5	No	No	No	No	No
CHIP	Yes	Yes 5	No	No	No	No	No
Marketplace insurance	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Maybe	Maybe	No
Marketplace subsidies	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
SNAP	Yes	Yes 5	No	No	No	No	No
TANF	Yes	Yes 5	Yes	No	No	No	No
Section 8 housing	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Federal student aid	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Head Start	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Public K-12 education	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Duties	Citizen	Green card	Refugees & asylees	DACA	Non-tourist visa	Asylum applicant	Unauthorized
Pay taxes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vote in fed. elections	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Eligible to work	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe 0.5	No
Eligible for work-auth SSN	Yes	Yes	Yes	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe 0.5	No
Serve in US military	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

Note: This chart reflects rulings as of August 12, 2025. Some marked as "changed by 2025 legislation" are not yet in effect. Emergency Medicaid is not included. DACA refers to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals recipients. Unauthorized refers to residents without any immigration status, including those unknown to the US government or who overstayed legal entry. Eligibility reflects rules for immigrants arriving after 1996; earlier arrivals may have different requirements.

Sources: Congressional Research Service, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, Food and Nutrition Service, Internal Revenue Service, USA.gov, US Citizenship and Immigration Services, US Congress

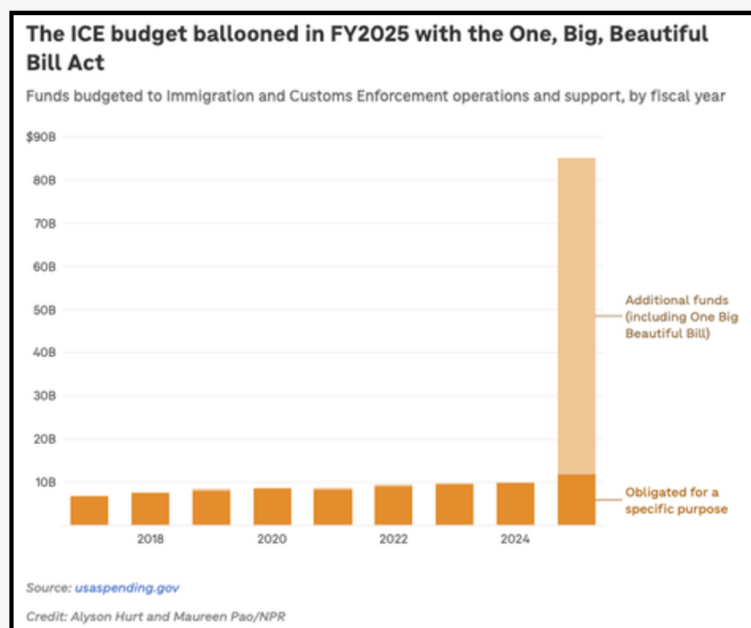




These policies push people from lawful or legally recognized status into legal uncertainty through no meaningful fault of their own.

Federal Enforcement Capacity Expanded Rapidly While Accountability Weakened

Immigration policy changes occurred alongside a major expansion of immigration enforcement capacity. In 2025, the federal government **increased ICE's annual funding by 850%**²⁵ for detention, staffing, and field operations. The agency moved quickly to expand its workforce and operational footprint, even as public concerns grew **regarding insufficient training,**²⁶ **lapses in accountability,**²⁷ and the **excessive use of force.**²⁸ Given that immigration enforcement agents operate in homes, workplaces, and public spaces—often without the same warrant or public transparency requirements as traditional law enforcement—insufficiently trained agents may put the public at risk. Already, ICE agents have perpetrated **civil rights violations**²⁹ and **violent incidents.**³⁰



At the same time, federal officials have defended broad enforcement discretion, claiming ICE agents have “**absolute immunity**”³¹ while resisting meaningful oversight. In fact, political fights regarding ICE's expanded immunity, reduced training, operational transparency, and aggressive enforcement tactics led to the **longest agency shutdown in U.S. history.**³²

Ultimately, however, DHS was funded and concerns remain largely unaddressed. For immigrant communities, ICE's expanded enforcement capacity and weakened accountability cause broad fear and uncertainty.

DHS led a National Strategy of High-Visibility Enforcement Operations

Starting in 2025, the federal administration deployed a series of highly visible immigration enforcement operations across the country. These operations were often announced and described in public safety terms, but they also carried clear political messaging. **Operation Midway Blitz**³³ (Chicago), **Los Angeles**,³⁴ and **Operation Metro Surge**³⁵ (Minneapolis) were all framed around criticism of state and local officials, including officials who had adopted policies limiting local participation in federal immigration enforcement.

Operation Catch of the Day³⁶ followed this national pattern. Like other high-visibility operations, it was presented as a public safety initiative aimed at dangerous individuals. However, the broader context suggests that the operation also functioned as a public demonstration of federal power. The use of dramatic operation names and the visible presence of masked, armed agents in busy public spaces reflect a strategy where immigration enforcement is a policing tool **and** a political message.

Community-Led Government Accountability Efforts Became More Dangerous

In response to the rapid federal expansion of immigration enforcement capacity, local communities across the country organized efforts to observe and document enforcement activity.

Communities and organizations formed watch networks, legal observer programs, rapid response systems, and Hotlines to coordinate local responses when enforcement activity occurs: documenting potential rights abuses, alerting people when loved ones have been taken, and rapidly connecting families to resources like legal aid and food.

These efforts are rooted in people's [First Amendment right to observe and document law enforcement](#)³⁷ activity in public, so long as they do not interfere with official duties. Through the organized use of First Amendment rights, communities provide grassroots government accountability at a time when the federal government has shirked transparency and accountability. They are also built on the principle of mutual aid: local community members caring for one another.

Consistent with their broader resistance to transparency and accountability, the federal government deployed rhetoric treating observation activity as suspicious and threatening. In December 2025, Homeland Security [unconstitutionally labeled observation of ICE](#)³⁸ as “antifa” and “domestic terrorism.” In January 2026, the consequences of this escalatory rhetoric became visible when Renee Good and Alex Pretti were killed during encounters with immigration officers after a major federal enforcement surge. In both cases, federal officials attempted to frame the victims as dangerous [domestic terrorists](#)³⁹ who threatened officer safety, but evidence showed that [ill-trained officers unnecessarily escalated](#)⁴⁰ the situation. Ultimately, when it became clear that ICE officers were at fault, [Trump called Renee Good's death](#)⁴¹ “a tragedy” and said that “officers will make mistakes.”

When federal officials frame observation, protest, or community defense as extremism, they increase the risk that ordinary residents, volunteers, advocates, and legal observers may be treated as threats simply for documenting government activity. Despite these risks, however, ICE observation efforts continue nationally – with the American public serving as an additional check to government.

Enforcement Patterns in Maine Were Already Changing Before Operation Catch of the Day

Immigration enforcement patterns in Maine were shifting before Operation Catch of the Day. MIRC's [Apprehension in Maine Report](#)⁴² projected that Maine would see a 73% to 89 % increase in ICE apprehensions between 2024 and 2025. Newly released ICE apprehension data confirm our prediction: Maine experienced an 85% increase in apprehensions between 2024 and 2025, all before Operation Catch of the Day began.

The profile of people ICE apprehended raises serious questions about the relationship between enforcement activity and public safety claims. MIRC's reporting shows that ICE apprehensions in Maine [overwhelmingly impact working-age men](#).⁴³ family breadwinners. Available data also indicates that the majority of people apprehended in Maine during this period had no criminal convictions or charges. Between January 2024 and February 2026, [81%](#)⁴⁴ of people apprehended by ICE in Maine had no previous criminal charges or convictions. ***This pattern suggests that enforcement activity was increasingly reaching people whose profiles did not align with the federal government's stated emphasis on serious public safety threats.***

Operation Catch of the Day was not an isolated enforcement action. It fits within a broader national strategy. Legal immigration pathways became more difficult to access and maintain, making it harder for immigrants to remain legally secure and easier for immigration violations to be treated as criminality. Work authorization processes became more unstable, making it harder for immigrants to earn a living. Enforcement capacity expanded rapidly. ICE deployed high-visibility operations across the nation. Community-led observation efforts became more politically contested and dangerous. In Maine, apprehensions were already increasing, and those apprehended were often working-age immigrants with no criminal background.

By the time OCTD began, these conditions had already converged, shaping how the operation was understood and why it generated immediate concern. Immigrant communities, local officials, employers, schools, and advocates had already observed this national pattern of intensified enforcement. Without clear information from federal authorities, fear grew across Maine communities as people struggled to understand what was happening and protect one another.

Expectations for OCTD

On January 21, 2026, ICE announced the start of **Operation Catch of the Day**,⁴⁵ a large-scale immigration enforcement operation conducted across Maine. The operation brought more than 100 masked and armed federal agents into Maine neighborhoods, streets, highways, and public spaces. DHS and ICE described the operation as a

targeted public safety initiative focused on apprehending the “worst of the worst criminal illegal aliens” who had allegedly “terrorized communities.”

The section below enumerates how ICE was “expected” to operate during OCTD based on DHS enforcement standards and stated operational goals. In doing so, we identify the standard against which OCTD can be evaluated to determine whether they successfully met their stated goal.

Expectation of a “Targeted” Operation

ICE described Operation Catch of the Day as a “targeted” enforcement operation.⁴⁶ In the immigration enforcement context, the term “targeted” carries operational significance. ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) has described “targeted” enforcement⁴⁷ as work that begins with “intelligence-driven leads” and results in “enforcement actions after thorough investigations.” In an enforcement context, “targeting” relates to the pre-identification and apprehension of specific individuals consistent with stated priorities, not the total number of people encountered or arrested. Therefore, ICE will meet its “targeting” standard if OCTD apprehensions predominantly result from pre-operation intelligence with controlled execution.

When the elements of a targeted operation are present, there is a visible through line from intelligence development to field execution. If OCTD was “targeted,” data should show evidence that officers used layered intelligence to build a clear case for each apprehension — drawing from immigration and criminal history. Next, officers should plan their apprehension, identifying the



person's address, movements, and any public risk factors. Supervisors should review apprehension plans, secure a warrant (as needed), conduct briefings, and provide officers with specific instructions on who they are seeking and where they are expected to find them. Finally, field teams should be deployed to specific locations for specific individuals, limiting unnecessary disruption and avoiding uncontrolled enforcement activity. Throughout, officers should be expected to understand applicable policy constraints, including limitations related to sensitive or private locations. The emphasis is on precise, disciplined action to meet narrow objectives. The available evidence, however, points in the opposite direction.

Expectation of Targeting the “Worst of the Worst”

In their [public statement announcing OCTD](#),⁴⁸ ICE described the operation as an effort to apprehend the “Worst of the Worst” criminal illegal aliens. In additional [correspondence with Representative Pingree and Senator King](#)⁴⁹, ICE described the “Worst of the worst” as including: gang members, terrorists, human rights abusers, foreign fugitives, and individuals with aggravated criminal convictions. Since criminal convictions carry a burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt, one would expect that this burden was met in a court of law; it is important to note that this framing sets a higher evidentiary burden than ordinary civil immigration enforcement, where you only need a preponderance of the evidence (50 + 1 %) to prove liability. **In short, ICE will meet its standard for targeting the “Worst of the Worst” if apprehensions primarily target people convicted of crimes that constitute a serious public safety risk.**

If OCTD targeted the “worst of the worst,” data should show that ICE primarily apprehended people who have met the burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt that they are public safety risks, such as: gang members, terrorists, and aggravated felons. Moreover, ICE should be able to report basic information about the immigration status, pending charges, criminal convictions, and felony history of immigrants apprehended. Unfortunately, again, available evidence points the other way.

Expectation of Terrorized Communities

In their [public statement announcing OCTD](#),⁵⁰ ICE claimed that immigrants had “terrorised communities” in Maine, and claimed to [target 1,400 individuals](#)⁵¹ on these grounds. This is an extraordinary public safety claim to justify a large-scale federal operation, and should be supported by Maine-specific evidence. ***Therefore, ICE will have adequately justified OCTD if it can produce credible evidence identifying where and to what degree Maine communities were being “terrorized” by immigrants.***

In Maine, “[terrorizing](#)”⁵² is legally defined as “intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly communicating a threat to commit a violent crime dangerous to human life, with conscious disregard that it places the threatened person in reasonable fear.” If immigrant communities had been terrorizing Maine, one would expect to see a documented pattern of serious immigrant-driven crime, including local law enforcement data indicating an unusual public safety threat and/or public records showing that the scale of the federal response was tied to a specific and substantiated crisis.

This standard is especially important given the demographic and economic context established earlier in this report. Maine's immigrant population is relatively small, diverse, largely well-established, and deeply connected to the state's workforce and communities. Any claim that this population posed an extraordinary public safety threat must be evaluated against that reality, not against national political rhetoric or generalized assumptions about immigration.

Analysis of OCTD

The preceding section established the standard against which OCTD must be evaluated. ICE advanced three central claims, each of which raises a corresponding question: (1) whether OCTD functioned as a "targeted" enforcement operation, (2) whether it primarily apprehended individuals with serious criminal backgrounds or clearly documented public safety indicators, and (3) whether the available evidence supports ICE's claim that immigrant communities had been "terrorizing" Maine.

The sections below analyze each "claim" in ICE's goal statement — comparing "expected" and "observed" ICE actions — to assess whether ICE acted in accordance with its stated goal. ***The analysis relies on the best available information, but that information is neither complete nor neutral.*** ICE's own data contains significant gaps, inconsistent categories, and naming practices that can distort public understanding. For example, large portions of ICE data on detainee criminal status are marked "Unknown." These limitations are part of the analysis.⁵³ If ICE claimed to conduct

a targeted public safety operation, then incomplete criminality data is, itself, relevant evidence.

Based on the available record, we find that ICE can not support its claim that OCTD targeted the worst of the worst immigrants terrorizing Maine. The operation was not meaningfully targeted, as shown by its reliance on collateral arrests, limited communication with Maine officials, and uncontrolled public-facing tactics. The Operation did not primarily target the "worst of the worst," as shown by the large share of individuals apprehended with no criminal convictions, ICE's incomplete criminality data, and the detention of children and people engaged in immigration processes. Finally, ICE could not substantiate its claim that immigrants were terrorizing Maine communities. ***On all three grounds, the evidence shows that OCTD failed to operate as the targeted public safety initiative ICE claimed it to be.***

Analysis 1: OCTD Did Not Function as a "Targeted" Enforcement

ICE will meet its "targeting" standard if OCTD apprehensions predominantly result from pre-operation intelligence with controlled execution. At the start of OCTD on [January 20, 2026](#),⁵⁴ ICE claimed that it had identified approximately [1,400 individuals in Maine for apprehension](#)⁵⁵ using a "variety of techniques."⁵⁶ Yet when the operation ended on [January 23](#), ICE made far fewer arrests: ICE [allegedly arrested 206 individuals](#) and publicly reported 188 arrests. ICE also claimed they were "unable to statistically report"⁵⁷ on the criminality of those apprehended. That gap between 1,400 alleged targets and approximately 188 to 206 arrests, combined with ICE's inability or unwillingness to provide basic

criminality data, raises serious questions about whether the agency had developed a genuine target list before the operation began.

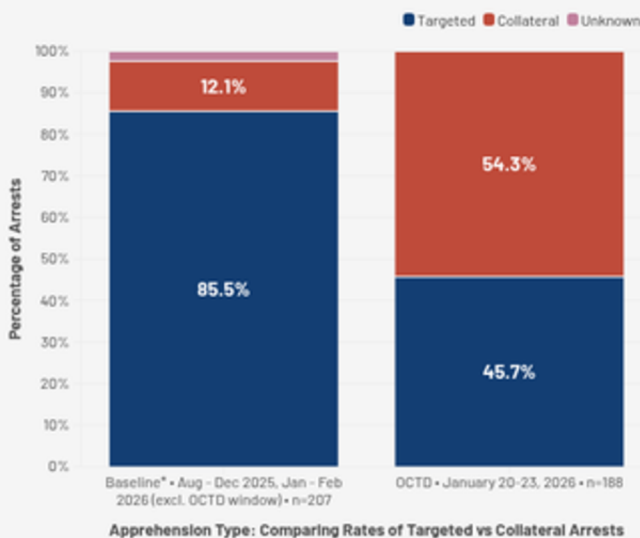
Utilizing ICE’s own data, however, reporters were able to identify that **only 6% of people apprehended during OCTD had a criminal conviction.**⁵⁸ MIRC’s analysis also found that 55% of arrests during the operation were classified as “collateral,” meaning the person arrested was most likely not identified as a target in advance. ***In short, ICE’s claim to have conducted a “targeted” operation is weakened by its own data, which shows a majority of apprehensions resulted from “collateral” field encounters – rather than advance targeting – and that most apprehended individuals did not have a criminal conviction.***

When compared to prior enforcement activity in Maine, ***we find that ICE agents made 4.5 times more “collateral” arrests during OCTD than during previous years.***

These collateral arrests included individuals already visible to the immigration system: people attempting to comply with legal immigration processes by attending check-ins, pursuing asylum, and maintaining work authorization. For these individuals, compliance with immigration procedures became a source of vulnerability. Instead of a disciplined, targeted operation, these findings point towards **dragnet enforcement**⁵⁹ targeting legally-insecure individuals, often in compliance with immigration processes.

ICE’s lack of communication with Maine’s elected officials reinforces the conclusion that OCTD was not “targeted.” Governor Mills stated, ***“We’ve reached out. We’ve asked questions. We have no answers.”***⁶⁰ Senator Collins’ office similarly stated, ***“We have no information.”***⁶¹ Representative Pingree⁶² and Senator King⁶³ reported that DHS ignored letters and meeting requests. Without timely information from federal authorities, state and local officials were forced to respond amid **uncertainty**,⁶⁴ while **residents, schools, employers, and community organizations**⁶⁵ attempted to understand what was happening in real time. ***By consistently avoiding communication with key Maine’s elected leadership regarding Operation Catch of the Day, ICE took either a disorganized or adversarial approach to engaging local stakeholders.*** Either way, misaligned communications from leadership increased community confusion, tension, and the opportunity for flashpoint encounters – making Mainers less safe.

During Operation Catch of the Day, collateral arrests jumped from 12% of ICE’s reported Maine arrests to 54% – a 4.5x increase.



*ICE began reporting Apprehension Type in August 2025



Only 6% of people apprehended during OCTD had a criminal conviction.

Lastly, available evidence indicates that ICE did not complete pre-operation intelligence to plan calm and controlled apprehensions that limit public safety risks. Instead, Mainers saw masked ICE agents make detentions in [highly public spaces](#),⁶⁶ [generally without warrants](#),⁶⁷ [impacting children](#),⁶⁸ [threatening protesters](#),⁶⁹ [being unnecessarily aggressive](#),⁷⁰ [smashing windows](#),⁷¹ [leaving cars abandoned](#),⁷² and expecting Mainers to [pick up the pieces](#).⁷³ Rather than targeted and controlled, ICE apprehensions during Operation Catch of the Day appear designed to create public fear and disruption. ***We find that Operation Catch of the Day was not a “targeted” operation as its defining feature was not precision, but broad enforcement activity carried out with limited transparency and significant community disruption.***

Analysis 2: OCTD Did Not Primarily Apprehend Individuals With Serious Criminal Backgrounds

ICE will meet its standard for targeting the “worst of the worst” if apprehensions primarily target people presenting a serious public safety risk, like an aggravated felony. ***ICE’s apprehension “criminality” data speaks to people’s public safety risk, but their terminology is problematic, manufacturing an undue appearance of criminality.*** ICE classifies an apprehended person’s “criminality” into three categories:

- A “**Convicted Criminal**” is a person with at least one criminal conviction,
- A person with “**Pending Criminal Charges**” has no criminal convictions, but at least one criminal charge.
- An “**Other Immigration Violator**” is someone who has not been charged or convicted of a crime, and may not have violated any immigration procedures.⁷⁴

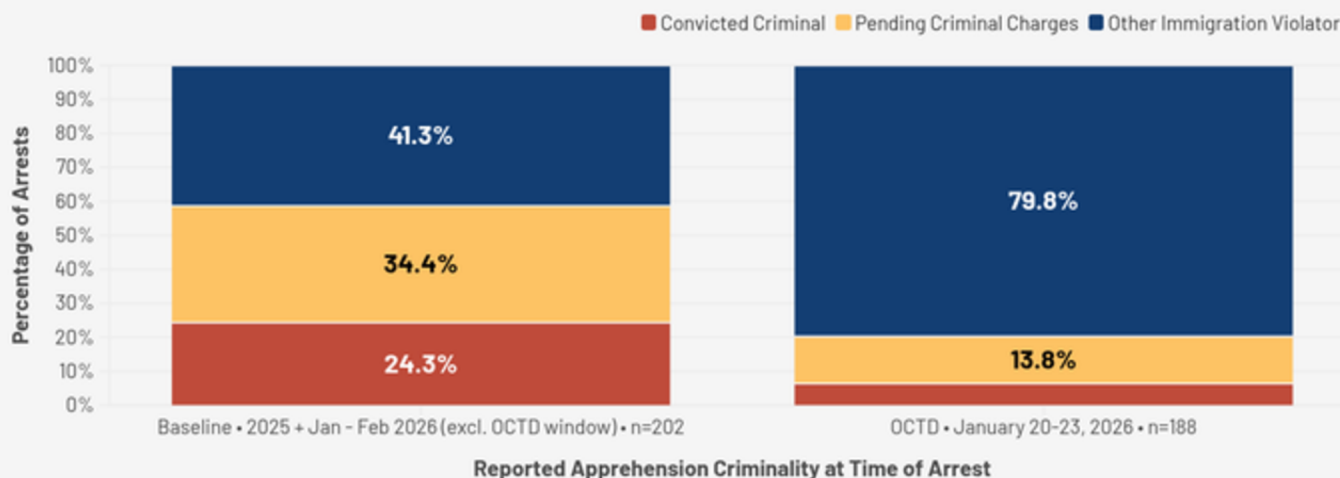
The distinction between “charges” and “convictions” is central to this analysis, and to the American value of due process. ICE’s criminality terms blur the boundaries between pending/ dismissed charges and convictions in ways that inflate the appearance of criminal threat. Critically, research from the [Cato Institute has found](#)⁷⁵ that charges cited in immigration detention data are often minor and frequently dismissed. ***Treating “charges” as equivalent to “convictions” weakens ICE’s public safety claim and obscures whether the people detained actually fit the “worst of the worst” profile.*** Furthermore, classifying people who have never been charged with or convicted of a crime as “violators” obscures the truth that these individuals have been abiding by US laws.

Exploring ICE’s criminality data, we find that only 6% of individuals apprehended during OCTD had a criminal conviction. 14% of people apprehended were listed as having been charged with a crime, but a charge is not a conviction and does not establish guilt. By contrast, 80% of individuals apprehended during the Operation have not been charged or convicted of any crime. ***Rather than targeting the “worst of the worst” during OCTD, ICE data shows they increasingly apprehended people without criminal charges or convictions.***

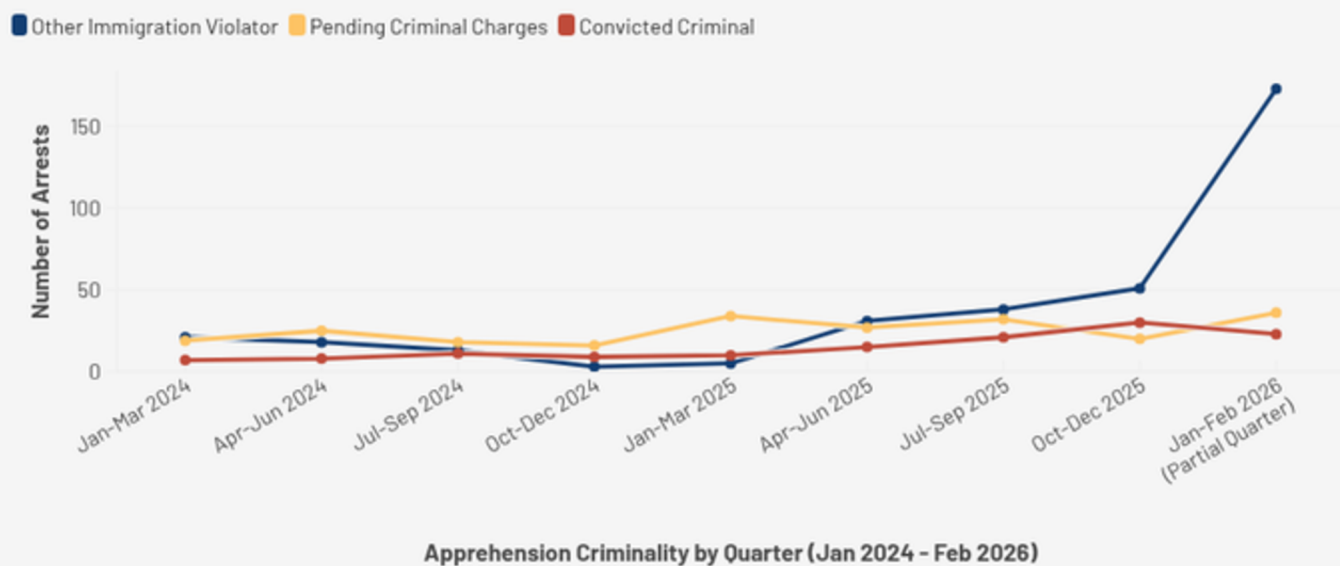
Many individuals apprehended by ICE — likely classified as “Other Immigration Violators” — were navigating the legal immigration system. This includes stories like that of [Olivia Andre](#),⁷⁶ a 19-year-old detained for six months in Texas, and [Yanick Joao Carneiro](#),⁷⁷ who was detained while attending an asylum check-in appointment.

These cases reflect a broader pattern: agents apprehended individuals during OCTD who were visible to immigration authorities – including those participating in legal immigration processes – in pursuit of a high detention volume rather than individuals presenting a public safety risk.

During Operation Catch of the Day, people with no criminal contact at all rose from 41% of arrests to 80% – concentrating enforcement on people with no record rather than people with criminal histories.



ICE increasingly targeted law-abiding immigrants with no criminal charges or convictions.



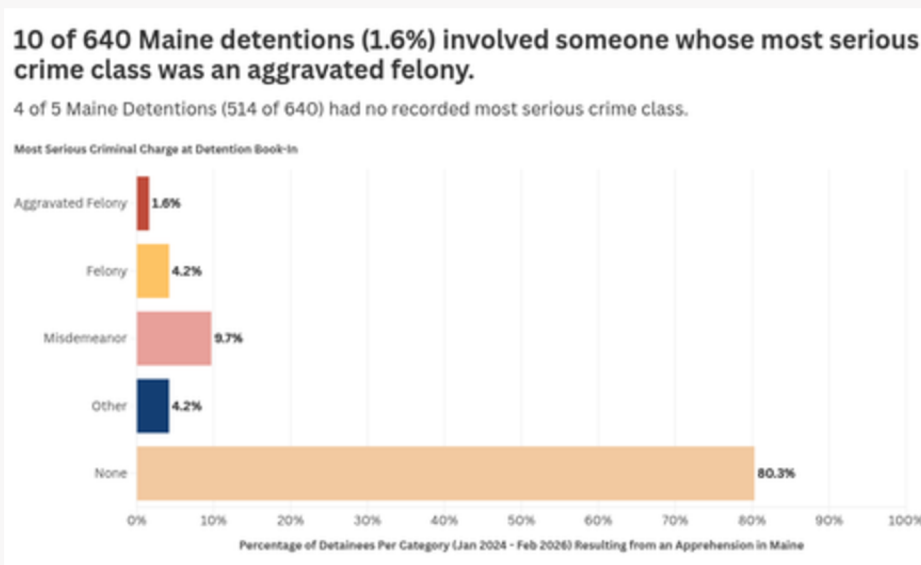
****PLEASE NOTE: An “Other Immigration Violator” is someone who has not been charged or convicted of a crime, and may not have violated any immigration procedures.**

When examining ICE's data on detainee "criminality" and "threat level" data more deeply, we find concerning gaps.

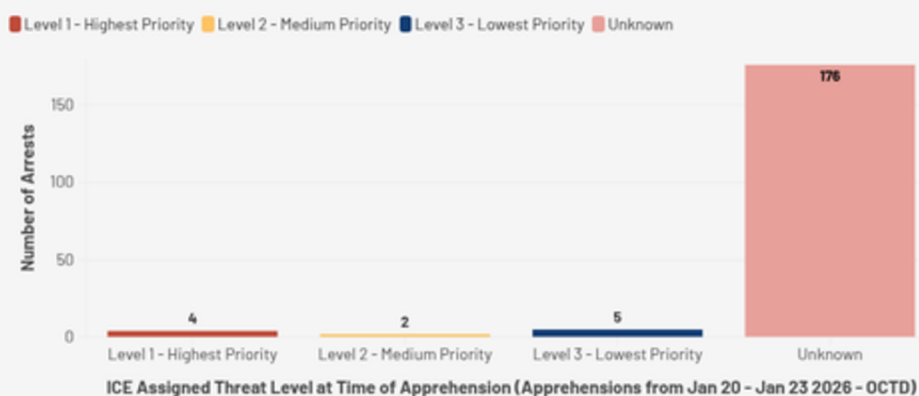
Between January 2024 and February 2026, ICE listed 80% of people detained as a result of an apprehension in Maine as having "None" criminal charges. It is unclear whether "None" means the detainee had no charge whatsoever, or whether ICE failed to record the charge. Working with what limited detainee "criminality" exists, we find that only 6% of people detained in Maine between January 2024 and February 2026 were convicted of a "felony" or "aggravated felony," plausibly aligning with ICE's "worst of the worst" rhetoric.⁷⁸

During OCTD, ICE also assigned 94% of their arrests as having an "Unknown" threat level. **In both instances, the data indicates that ICE did not know or would not disclose the criminal charges and public safety threat level for the preponderance of people they detained in Maine.** This fact makes ICE's operational "public safety" rationale even less credible.⁷⁹

Taken together, the data indicate that ICE did not target the "worst of the worst." They do not know or will not report on the immigration and criminal status of many detainees in Maine. Where they do offer "criminality" data, we find that ICE increasingly detained people with no criminal charges or convictions, and only a slim minority of detainees had a felony charge, plausibly meeting the definition of "worst of the worst." **Instead, the facts indicate that ICE prioritized detention volume over public safety.** They increasingly apprehended people who had no interaction with the criminal justice system or had an unproven charge, which may have been thrown out, not people with a pre-existing criminal background. As [Portland Mayor Mark Dion](#) said:⁸⁰



In 94% of Arrests during Operation Catch of the Day, ICE data shows that the agency did not know the threat level of the apprehended individual.



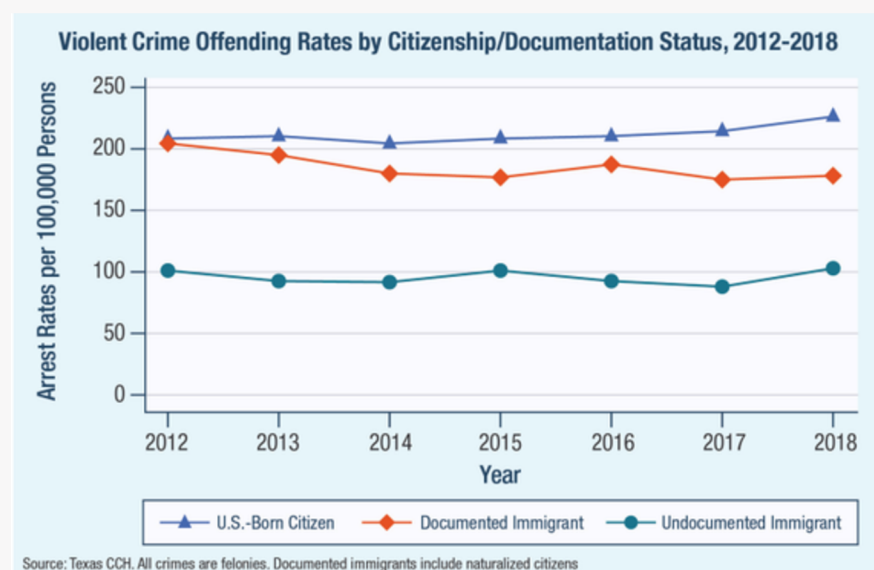
“If ICE has an issue with criminal aliens, let them actually be criminals.”



Analysis 3: Available Evidence Refutes the Claim that Immigrant Communities Terrorized Maine

ICE's third claim was that immigrants had "terrorized communities" in Maine. They used this claim to justify the deployment of more than 100 masked, armed agents into Maine communities. A claim of that magnitude requires evidence, not isolated examples, political rhetoric, and inflated criminality categories. ICE has not identified a federal criminal offense titled "terrorizing." Maine law, however, defines "Terrorizing"⁸¹ as a "intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly communicating a threat to commit a violent crime dangerous to human life, with conscious disregard that the threat would place another person in reasonable fear." The available evidence does not substantiate ICE's claim.

National research consistently finds that immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, commit crimes at lower rates than U.S.-born citizens. In 2024, the Department of Justice found⁸² that undocumented immigrants were arrested at less than half the rate of native-born U.S. citizens for violent and drug crimes, and at approximately one-quarter the rate for property crimes.



These findings are consistent with research from the National Bureau of Economic Research,⁸³ the Annual Review of Criminology, the Cato Institute,⁸⁴ and others. ICE's claim that immigrants were "terrorizing" Maine, therefore, runs against the broader record on immigration and crime in the US.

Maine's public safety context further weakens ICE's claim. Maine has one of the lowest crime rates⁸⁵ in the country, with crime levels significantly below the national average. The state's violent crime rate also declined⁸⁶ despite the 2023 mass homicide in Lewiston, an event that significantly shaped public safety concerns in Maine but was not connected to immigrant communities. Reviewing public reporting, MIRC found no discernible pattern of immigrant-driven crime in Maine that would support ICE's rhetoric. ICE's own examples were weak,⁸⁷ providing only five examples⁸⁸ of immigrants allegedly "terrorizing" in Maine. One example involved a person whose only cited charge was operating under the influence of alcohol (OUI). While an important crime, an OUI does not fit Maine's definition of "terrorizing." As Mayor Dion observed,⁸⁹ "Those were...[the] top picks to show you the state of crime and justice in Maine. An OUI?" At the same time, Maine's immigrant

population remains a relatively small, diverse, well-established, and deeply connected to local communities, schools, workplaces, and public institutions.

In short, ICE has not produced any relevant Maine-specific evidence showing that immigrants posed an extraordinary public safety threat. Moreover, analysis of Maine's criminal and community context showcases that Maine is an extremely safe state by

national standards, and our immigrant communities are small and well-established. **By invoking the language of “terror” without producing evidence, ICE relied on rhetoric rather than a substantiated public safety claim to justify OCTD.**

ALTERNATIVE OBJECTIVES

Through comparative analysis of ICE’s “expected” and “observed” actions during Operation Catch of the Day (OCTD), we find that ICE consistently took actions contrary to their stated mission and enforcement standards. Available evidence does not show a disciplined, targeted enforcement operation. It does not show that ICE primarily apprehended individuals with serious criminal backgrounds. It does not substantiate the claim that immigrant communities were “terrorizing” Maine. On all counts, ICE failed to substantiate its stated public safety goal while imposing high civic, social, and economic costs on Maine communities. **Given ICE’s consistent action contrary to OCTD’s stated mission, we find significant reason to doubt that OCTD’s stated mission drove operation decision-making.**

As Cumberland County Sheriff Kevin Joyce stated:

“We’re being told one story which is totally different than what’s occurring.”



This section below asks: If OCTD was not principally a targeted, public safety operation, what other operational, political, and social functions did it serve? To answer this question, our analysis draws from ICE’s public statements, enforcement patterns, media strategy, and community impacts. The available evidence suggests that the operation served purposes beyond conventional law enforcement. ***OCTD functioned as a political show of force – relying on highly visible tactics that generated fear, disruption, and deterrence – that disproportionately affected immigrants of color and legally vulnerable communities while treating immigration status as a proxy for criminality.***

Political Use of Armed Agents

The clearest evidence that OCTD served purposes beyond ordinary law enforcement comes from ICE’s own public statements. ICE **explicitly invoked Maine Governor Janet Mills**⁹⁰ when explaining the operation, stating that she would rather “stand with criminal illegal aliens” than “protect law-abiding American citizens.” Federal law enforcement agencies do not typically justify enforcement operations by attacking elected officials. By naming Governor Mills directly, ICE framed OCTD not only as a public safety action but also as a response to state political leadership.

OCTD fits cleanly into a broader **pattern of political retribution**.⁹¹ by the Trump Administration. OCTD was launched shortly after Governor Mills **publicly clashed**⁹² with President

Trump and amid broader federal pressure on Maine, including threats or actions involving [Social Security services](#),⁹³ the [Maine Sea Grant](#),⁹⁴ and the [Maine Department of Education](#).⁹⁵ In that context, OCTD can reasonably be understood as part of a broader pattern in which federal authority was used to pressure Maine officials and signal consequences for political disagreement. ICE also told Representative Pingree and Senator King that OCTD targeted jurisdictions that “historically refuse to honor detainees”: language commonly used to criticize “sanctuary jurisdictions.” However, the [Department of Justice has not currently listed Maine or any Maine municipality as a sanctuary jurisdiction](#).⁹⁶ In fact, upon analysis of ICE’s own data, we find that Maine has honored 90.9%⁹⁷ of detainees between November 2022 and February 2026. If [“refusing to honor detainees”](#)⁹⁸ was an operational rationale, Maine does not fit the stated category. ICE’s own explanation, therefore, raises more questions than it resolves, while setting a dangerous precedent. The agency appears to have deployed out-of-state, armed agents into Maine at least partly because federal officials inaccurately understood and objected to state or local policy positions. ***Federal enforcement power should not be used to punish political disagreement, pressure state and municipal officials, or turn local policy disputes into armed federal operations.***

Legally Vulnerable, Racial Targeting

During OCTD, [one Mainer described](#)⁹⁹ hearing a woman yell, “I’m a citizen,” while agents ignored her, and concluded, “That was just straight-up racial profiling.” While individual accounts require careful review, this conclusion bears out in the data.



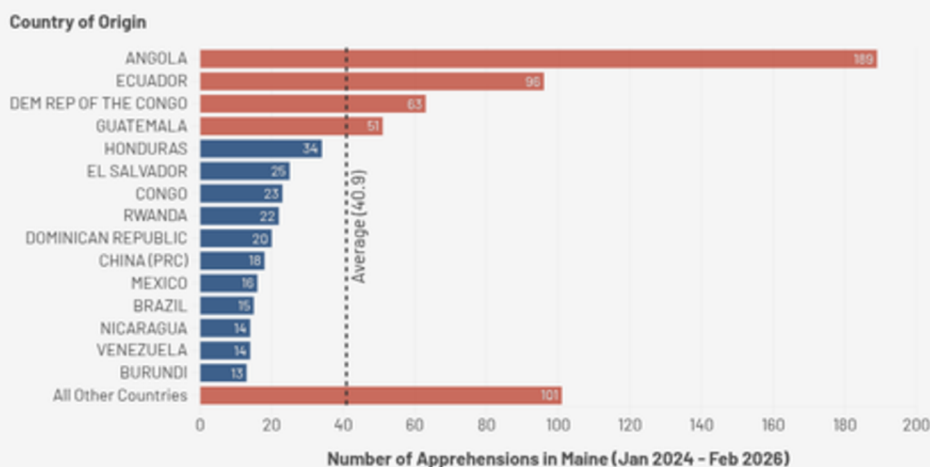
- 'See you in court': Trump and Maine's governor spar over trans athlete order**
POLITICS
 Maine Public Feb 2025
- Trump administration launches investigation into Maine schools over transgender policy**
Notice of the investigation came hours after Gov. Janet Mills and President Donald Trump had tense exchange at White House
 Maine Morning Star Feb 2025
- Maine loses popular Sea Grant funding, 1 week after Mills' public confrontation at the White House**
 Maine Public March 2025
- Maine service cuts: SSA acting chief's regret over brief pause**
MAINE POLITICS
The Social Security Administration briefly ended key services in Maine as political retaliation, according to its acting head.
 News Center Maine March 2025
- Trump administration has frozen \$50M in UMaine System funding so far**
More than \$21 million in grants was either terminated or put on hold as the university system was negotiating their terms and conditions, college officials say.
 Portland Press Herald March 2025

The effects of OCTD were extremely uneven across immigrant communities. Maine’s immigrant population is [diverse](#).¹⁰⁰ Approximately 43% of Maine immigrants come from Europe or North America, 25% from Asia, 20% from Africa, and 10% from Latin America. However, OCTD predominantly targeted immigrants from African and Latin American countries, including Angolans, Congolese, Ecuadorians, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans. ***In fact, while Africans and Latin Americans make up just 30% of Maine’s immigrant population, they made up 94% of people apprehended by ICE in Maine between January 2024 and February 2026.***¹⁰¹



Latin Americans/ Africans are 30% of Maine Immigrants and 94% of people apprehended.

Africa and Latin America together account for 94% of Apprehensions in Maine



The absence of significant arrests from Maine’s Somali community is also notable. Maine’s Somali community includes many refugees and U.S. citizens, making them less legally vulnerable to immigration enforcement despite hostile national rhetoric directed at Somali immigrants. ***This contrast also suggests that OCTD’s operational limits were shaped by immigration status and legal exposure rather than by generalized public safety concerns.***

While each case may differ, many people from Africa and Latin America came to Maine through asylum, Temporary Protected Status, and other humanitarian pathways, which have been destabilized by recent federal policy changes. People navigating humanitarian immigration pathways are often already visible to the federal government. They may have pending applications, scheduled check-ins, known addresses, or prior contact with immigration agencies. Given ICE’s frequent apprehension of people with no criminal background and regular accounts of [apprehensions during “check-in” appointments](#)¹⁰² at ICE’s office in Scarborough, it appears ICE apprehended some individuals precisely because they were attempting to comply with legal immigration procedure, even when they do not pose a public safety threat. ***These patterns suggest that ICE’s enforcement activity was shaped less by criminal danger than by racial profile and legal vulnerability.***

The resulting enforcement profile is clear: in a state where the overall population is overwhelmingly white – and where a significant share of immigrants are also white – OCTD disproportionately affected immigrants of color, particularly from African and Latin American countries. Many of these individuals are working-age men navigating immigration proceedings with no documented criminal background. ***For those communities, the operation sent a practical warning: visibility within the legal immigration system could itself become a risk.***

Presumed Criminal, Regardless of Conduct

Noting the gap between ICE’s stated goal and observed actions, Senator King and Representative Pingree told ICE, “There have been numerous arrests of individuals without criminal records...This is contrary to the DHS statement that the objective of OCTD is to arrest the ‘worst of the worst.’”

Unable to sustain their targeting claim, ICE advanced a broader justification for apprehensions: all immigrants are appropriate enforcement targets because future criminal conduct should not be awaited. Specifically, ICE stated that¹⁰³ waiting to arrest or remove immigrants until “after the commission of another crime against American citizens” is “akin to trying to purchase fire insurance on a home currently in flames.” immigrants can be presumed criminal, regardless of conduct.

This logic is legally and analytically dangerous. Not only does it **believe consistent government data**¹⁰⁴ proving immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than US born citizens, but it is also inconsistent with **a basic principle of American law**:¹⁰⁵ people are presumed innocent until guilt is established through a legal process. That principle does not disappear in the immigration context, particularly when ICE relies on criminal allegations to justify a public safety operation. If federal officials describe people as criminals, dangerous, or the “worst of the worst,” the public should and would expect those claims to rest on convictions, reliable evidence, and clear public safety indicators, not on pending charges, dismissed allegations, incomplete records, or false assumptions about future conduct.

ICE’s logic collapses several distinct immigration and criminal statuses into one. Immigration status is not the same as criminal conduct. A pending charge is not the same as a conviction. A dismissed charge is neither a conviction nor proof of an alleged offense. A civil immigration violation is not the same as a public safety threat. Yet ICE’s framing moves between these categories as if they are interchangeable. **When these categories are blurred, the public is left with an inflated**

impression of criminality that the underlying data does not support.

ICE’s logic becomes more dangerous when observed in context. As noted above, the federal government has altered immigration policy in ways that push people from lawful or legally recognized status into legal uncertainty through no meaningful fault of their own. In this light, ICE’s logic creates a dangerous sequence where:

1. **Legal immigration pathways are narrowed or withdrawn**, making people legally vulnerable,
2. **Legal vulnerability is then treated as illegality**,
3. **Illegality is conflated with criminality**, and
4. **Criminality is used to justify detention and removal** without meaningful attention to due process, family stability, community ties, or actual public safety risk.

Cumberland County Sheriff Joyce captured the **problem**¹⁰⁶ directly when a corrections officer from the sheriff’s office was detained by ICE during OCTD:

“I guess if you’re not a card-carrying US citizen, then you must be illegal... Because that’s what they told me, he’s illegal. And he’s definitely not a criminal. So what part of him is illegal? I don’t know.”

A **Maine employer expressed**¹⁰⁷ the same concern more plainly:

“It’s just a huge mess of fear for people who are here legally...[our employee] is legal. We’ve done all the checks. He is not a criminal, and he’s just gone.”

These accounts reflect the broader operational logic of OCTD, and of ICE writ large. Federal officials characterized immigrants as illegal, criminal, and dangerous regardless of due process and actual conduct. The operation translated that logic into practice by detaining people who were legally present, pursuing legal relief, working, supporting families, attending check-ins, and, in many cases, had no criminal background. **OCTD, therefore, cannot be understood only as a response to crime; it reflects a policy environment in which immigration status itself is increasingly treated as a proxy for criminality.**

A Show of Force

As shown above, the operational characteristics of OCTD were not consistent with a narrow, efficient, targeted public safety operation. Masked and armed agents operated in public spaces. Arrests unfolded in visible and disruptive ways. Agents relied heavily on collateral arrests. The administration released dramatic press materials, allowed partisan media access to enforcement activity, and used a provocative operation name designed to attract attention. Rather than public safety, these features are consistent with performative enforcement: activity designed not only to produce arrests, but also to signal toughness, display federal power, generate media content, and create deterrence through fear. **In this model, public visibility is the defining aspect of the strategy.**

The examples of OCTD's performative enforcement are widespread. In just four days of active operations, Mainers saw a woman **dragged from her car**¹⁰⁸ while screaming for help. They saw ICE break a car window, **spraying glass on a baby**.¹⁰⁹ **Children watched agents debate**¹¹⁰ whether to detain their mother. As **Lewiston's mayor observed**,¹¹¹ the fear reached far beyond

one person. Schools reported **reduced attendance**.¹¹² Some immigrant-owned **businesses temporarily closed**.¹¹³ **Workers stayed home**¹¹⁴ to shelter in place with their families. The **economic effects extended beyond immigrant households**¹¹⁵ and affected employers, schools, service providers, and local communities. Maine's experience was unfortunately similar to other states that withstood a surge. In the wake of Operation Metro Surge, Minnesota's economy **lost millions of dollars**¹¹⁶ and **jobs**.¹¹⁷

OCTD did not merely remove individuals from Maine communities. ICE's use of performative enforcement disrupted civic life, strained public trust, interfered with schools and workplaces, and made ordinary public activity feel dangerous for immigrants and their families. Those costs are difficult to justify under a public safety rationale, particularly when ICE has not produced evidence that Maine faced an extraordinary immigrant-driven crime threat.

A Show of Solidarity

OCTD also produced a community response that became part of the operation's legacy. **While Mainers experienced fear, we did not offer compliance—we organized.** Immigrant leaders, advocates, volunteers, schools, service providers, faith communities, local businesses, and residents **built rapid response systems**¹¹⁸ to document enforcement activity, support families, and reduce harm.

Community members **formed observation networks**¹¹⁹ to provide public accountability at a time when federal oversight of ICE is weakening. Mutual aid groups organized rides, child care, food delivery, and assistance with vehicles left behind during arrests or snow bans.

Food pantries adapted¹²⁰ delivery systems so families could shelter in place. Schools prepared remote learning options. Residents called the Maine Immigrant Defense Hotline to report ICE sightings and share information. **Thousands of Mainers rallied¹²¹** across the state, and **businesses closed in solidarity¹²²** with immigrant neighbors.

This response showcases that enforcement does not occur in a vacuum. Federal operations reshape local institutions, public trust, and civic behavior. OCTD was designed to project federal power, but it also revealed the strength of Maine's community infrastructure. In Brunswick, **one resident observed,¹²³** "I've met more of my neighbors in this last week than in the past three years." Maine's show of solidarity does not erase the harm caused by the operation; it does, however, demonstrate that Maine communities have built the capacity to resist fear-based enforcement and support one another through crises. ***OCTD reminded Mainers that organizing is good for us and good for our state.***

What Maine Learned from OCTD

Taken together, the actions and impacts of OCTD point toward a conclusion broader than operational failure. ***ICE did not merely fail to prove that the operation was targeted or necessary. The operation itself appears to have served political, symbolic, and deterrent functions that imposed real costs on Maine communities.***

It used the language of public safety while producing fear, instability, and public disruption. It was targeted based on racial status and legal vulnerability more than criminal risk. It attempted to project federal power, but it also prompted organized community defense.

For MIRC and our partners, our objection to OCTD is not only that it was poorly justified and disruptive. ***Our deeper objection is that ICE treated immigration status as a proxy for danger, blurred the line between allegations and convictions, and made people feel that visibility within the legal immigration system could itself become a risk. In doing so, ICE's actions departed from America's core principles of equal protection, due process, refuge, and shared contribution.*** It violates our nation's core principle that people should not be presumed criminal because of where they were born, what they look like, or where they stand in a complex immigration process. While these ideals have never been applied perfectly or completely, that only makes our obligation to defend them more urgent.

We also object to ICE's disregard for our nation's immigrant history, which has always been a key to our success. From **Thomas Paine's¹²⁴** call for America to "receive the fugitive," to **George Washington's¹²⁵** hope that this country would be a "safe & agreeable asylum," to **Abraham Lincoln's¹²⁶** recognition of immigration as a source of national "wealth and strength," American leaders have always understood that immigration is core to our nation's history and promise.



Immigration enforcement has often functioned as a testing ground for how much government intrusion the public will accept. Masked agents, unclear identification, warrantless public arrests, incomplete data, threats toward observers, and the treatment of civil immigration status as criminal suspicion should concern every Mainer, regardless of immigration status. When the government can normalize these tactics against immigrants, the same logic can migrate into other areas of public life. ***The work to protect our immigrant communities and civil liberties is intertwined.***

Maine's response should be guided by a simple principle: when federal power expands in ways that weaken due process, public accountability and access to care, Maine's institutions and people must become more protective of our rights, accountable to each other, and caring for our neighbors.

Following this principle, the Maine Legislature recognized the need to limit detention entanglement and protect personal information from misuse by passing [LD 1971](#).¹²⁷ Following this leadership, [Portland](#),¹²⁸ [Rockland](#),¹²⁹ [Lewiston](#),¹³⁰ and the [Cumberland County Board of Commissioners](#)¹³¹ took steps to [examine or limit local collaboration with ICE](#).¹³² MIRC's coalition came together to form the Maine Immigrant Defense Hotline helping communities report ICE activity and address resource needs. Nonprofits and local towns adapted food distribution, education accessibility, and financial assistance to ensure Mainers stay safe and fed. Individual Mainers neighbors volunteered their time to bolster organizational work and formed new rapid response and mutual aid networks. Just today, MIRC and its partners launched [LighthouseME](#) to further strengthen transparency around immigrant welfare and enforcement activity.

While Mainers have adapted, ICE has adapted its enforcement tactics too. For now, at least, ICE seems to have learned that “performative enforcement” is a failing strategy. Today, we are seeing less intentionally inflammatory arrests, but ICE has continued to make arrests nonetheless – often targeting legally insecure immigrants with no criminal background – families who came to the US offering their creativity and seeking a better life. These arrests are less visible and therefore less likely to spark public attention. As we look ahead into 2026 and beyond, we see signs that ICE will again expand enforcement operations in Maine. ICE has not rescinded its claim – perhaps quota – of 1,400 “targets” in Maine. ICE is still the [highest funded law enforcement agency](#).¹³³ Just this April, 2026, ICE [released a scope of work](#) seeking new office space in Portland, Scarborough, and Caribou for expanded agent presence in Maine.

Recommended Actions

Operation Catch of the Day was intended to project federal power but instead revealed the strength of Maine communities that refused to let fear define our public response. Now, we need to build on our momentum. There is more work to be done.

Following the words etched into the entrance of the Supreme Court – Equal Justice Under Law – we must lead broad policy change that elevates fact -



based decision-making and defends the rights of all Mainers. These changes must acknowledge that Maine becomes less safe when immigrants are treated as threats and armed agents are deployed over political disagreements. Safety, instead, comes through evidence, accountability, due process, and the shared well-being of all who live here. ***Following our vision of care, we must move from emergency response to durable public infrastructure.*** We must build and maintain systems that help families in Maine stay housed, stay fed, access care, and receive legal support. ***As always, we must follow our vision towards a rational and efficient immigration system that keeps us safe while allowing people to move to Maine and help us grow.*** Through the actions below, we continue to lead change for a future where all Mainers – including immigrants – thrive together.

State/ Local Policy Actions

- Establish Universal Representation** No immigrant facing detention or removal should be forced to navigate immigration court alone. ***Maine should establish a statewide Universal Representation program that connects immigrants facing detention or removal with qualified legal counsel,*** with priority for children, asylum seekers, detained individuals, and residents with strong family, employment, or community ties in Maine. Immigration proceedings are civil, but the consequences can be permanent: family separation, loss of livelihood, and removal from the country. A universal representation program would strengthen due process, improve court efficiency, and help ensure that cases are decided based on law and facts rather than a person's ability to afford counsel.
- Protect Immigrant Workers and Strengthen Labor Standards** Maine has made important progress in protecting workers, but immigrant workers, especially farmworkers and other workers in low-wage sectors, remain vulnerable to exploitation, retaliation, and exclusion from basic labor protections. The people who harvest, process, prepare, clean, build, care, and serve are essential to Maine's economy and should not be treated as second-class workers. ***Maine should continue strengthening labor protections for all workers regardless of immigration status, including stronger anti-retaliation protections, wage enforcement, workplace safety protections, and access to remedies when employers use immigration status as a threat.*** Maine should also close remaining gaps in farmworker protections, including full inclusion in collective action and workplace safety standards.
- Expand Protection of Local Resources** Maine's local agencies already have enough responsibility addressing local needs. Following the model of [LD 1971](#), ***Maine should expand protections to ensure that state and local resources are used for state and local priorities, not for federal civil immigration enforcement.*** This should include clear limits on the use of local personnel, facilities, equipment, data systems, and public funds for civil immigration enforcement absent a judicial warrant or clear legal requirement. Maine should also require

public reporting of ICE requests involving law enforcement agencies, jails, prisons, schools, shelters, health care facilities, courts, municipal offices, and public agencies. Transparency is necessary to ensure that Maine residents understand when and how local systems are being asked to support federal enforcement activity.

- **Fund Community-Based Rapid Response Infrastructure** The response to Operation Catch of the Day showed that community defense is community infrastructure. *Maine should provide sustained funding for community-based rapid response systems*, including the Maine Immigrant Defense Hotline, legal observer training, know-your-rights education, interpretation, regional resource navigation, emergency transportation coordination, and trusted communications networks. These systems reduce panic, provide accurate information, connect families to help, and create public accountability when federal enforcement activity occurs.

Federal Policy Actions

- **Protect those Navigating Humanitarian Immigration** The United States must not turn away from its history or founding principles. This country has long understood refuge, asylum, and opportunity as central to the American promise. The federal government should immediately reverse policy changes that have made asylum, Temporary Protected Status, refugee resettlement, and other humanitarian immigration pathways less accessible, less efficient, and less stable. This includes restoring the refugee resettlement program, removing new asylum fees, preserving and extending humanitarian protections where conditions warrant, and allowing federal agencies to use data, country conditions, and humanitarian need rather than political pressure to guide protection decisions.
- **Help Immigrants Stay in the Workforce** Maine businesses need workers, and eligible immigrants need stable access to work authorization. Long delays, high fees, short renewal periods, and unnecessary administrative barriers harm workers, employers, families, and local economies. The federal government should reduce the mandatory waiting period before asylum seekers can apply for work authorization from 180 days to 30 days, eliminate work permit fees, and ensure that work authorization remains valid while an underlying asylum, humanitarian, or protection-based application remains pending. Congress could at least reinstate and protect automatic work permit extensions, including the 540-day extension, so that eligible workers are not pushed out of the workforce because of federal processing delays.
- **Restore Access to Health Care, Food Assistance, and Basic Supports** No child in America should go hungry or go without care because of a parent's immigration status. The federal government should restore and protect access to SNAP, CHIP, Medicaid, and other basic supports for immigrant families and children. These programs support public health, child development, household stability, and long-term economic participation. Preventive care

and food security are less costly and more humane than crisis response. A federal budget that can provide massive increases for immigration enforcement can also invest in keeping children fed, families healthy, and communities stable.

- **Fund the Immigration System, Not Enforcement** Enforcement cannot be the only well-funded part of the immigration system. A safe and orderly immigration system also requires lawful pathways that people can actually access, understand, and complete. The federal government appropriated extraordinary resources (**\$170 billion**) towards immigration enforcement while underfunding the systems that make lawful immigration functional. A rational immigration system requires adjudication capacity, legal processing, language access, case management, and integration support. Congress should reappropriate ICE's historic funding towards the immigration system for hiring and training of immigration judges, asylum officers, interpreters, legal support staff, and USCIS personnel to reduce years-long backlogs. The federal government should also support coordinated federal, state, and local task forces focused on welcoming services, language learning, workforce integration, civic education, and legal navigation. The first pillar of ICE's mission is to protect America **through criminal investigations**. As such Congress should strengthen oversight of ICE and DHS to prevent further mission drift in its enforcement operations, including increasing data transparency, banning the use of masked or unidentified agents, threats toward observers, collateral arrests, and cruel and unusual detention conditions.
- **A \$1.8 Billion Investment in American Communities** The American people deserve a government that invests in their future, not one that diverts public resources to reward political loyalists and ideological allies. While communities struggle with housing shortages, unaffordable childcare, healthcare access barriers, and underfunded public services, \$1.8 billion could instead be used to strengthen the foundations of economic security and community well-being. Investing these resources in housing, healthcare, childcare, workforce development, and efficient public services would create lasting benefits for millions of Americans. Federal dollars should be spent serving the public interest, not subsidizing political patronage.

Towards a Maine where all people can thrive.

Community Actions

- **LEARN** - Explore *LighthouseME!* Learn more about issues impacting immigrants.
- **SHARE** - Educate your community by reposting our social media and distributing our resource flyers.
- **PREPARE** - Reach out to *Volunteer Lawyer Project* to prepare your family and finances in case of a detention.
- **PROTECT OUR WORKPLACES** - Sign your workplace up for a training with *Presente!ME* and *Prevention Action Change* to learn how to keep your workplace safe.
- **VOLUNTEER** - Consider volunteering with a MIRC member organization. For a complete list of MIRC coalition organizations, please visit [our website](#).
- **SUPPORT** - Host a fundraising party or donate directly to groups supporting immigrants.
 - **Immigrant Support Funds** - We especially recommend donations to funds offering direct financial aid, like the [Maine Solidarity Fund](#), [Community Relief Fund](#), [Mainers for Humane Immigration](#), [Project Relief Maine](#), [L/A Rapid Response](#), and [Project HOME](#).
 - **Ethnic Community Based Organizations (ECBOs)** - We also encourage donations to ECBO's in Maine. Given ICE's disproportionate impact on African and Latin American communities, please consider donations to the [Angolan Community Association](#), [CoCo Maine](#), [Presente!ME](#), and [Mano en Mano](#). For a complete list of MIRC coalition organizations, please visit [our website](#).
- **CONNECT** - Talk with your neighbors and family about forming a mutual aid group.

Want to learn more?

Visit [LighthouseME.org](#) to find information, connect to resources, and explore data



And always, if you need support...

Call the Hotline (207) 544-9989



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