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California Rapid Response Networks Slam ICE Raids As Threat to Public Health

Advocates, legal observers, and attorneys are on standby 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In the wake of recent press reports that Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is planning an operation to target sanctuary cities ahead of the November election, California Rapid Response Networks released the following statement:

The recent reports about an operation by ICE to target sanctuary cities is just the latest instance of a lawless and rogue agency being used as a political weapon ahead of the presidential elections. This announcement follows a predictable pattern in which ICE uses the media to stir up fear and panic and perpetuate a narrative which victimizes and demonizes immigrants and people of color.

According to unnamed officials cited in press reports, the planned operation is intended to be a “a political messaging campaign” by ICE. This raises very serious questions about whether ICE is choosing to violate mandatory and specific Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance to achieve political objectives as an agency.

The real story here is that ICE is and continues to be an unscrupulous agency from top to bottom. It is operating under dubious legal authority, with the [current Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security being illegally appointed](#). Furthermore, recent reports indicate that the former head of ICE Matthew Albence was forced to resign based on his reluctance to authorize ICE raids and community arrests during a pandemic. Lastly, ICE has failed miserably to live up to its own COVID-19 [Pandemic Response Requirements](#), having reached its [highest death toll](#) in the last 15 years in detention based on its inhumane and negligent operations.

According to its own mandatory Pandemic Response Requirements, which include the CDC’s Interim Guidance on Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Correctional and Detention Facilities, ICE is required to take the following steps:

- Develop information-sharing systems and coordinate with public health partners.¹
- Follow the Public Health Recommendations for Community-Related Exposure
- “comply with current and future plans implemented by federal, state or local authorities addressing specific public health issues including communicable disease reporting requirements.”²
- The CDC guidance on detention specifically requires detention facilities to limit transfers of individuals to and from facilities unless “absolutely necessary”.³

There have been COVID-19 outbreaks in four of the five detention facilities in the state of California, and transfers into two of these facilities have been halted as a result of litigation focused on ICE’s inability to properly address the health and safety of those detained.⁴

In addition to the threat posed to those inside detention we are gravely concerned about the impact this has on public health as a whole. A study published in the [Journal of Urban Health](#) on the spread of COVID-19 in immigrant detention facilities estimates that coronavirus outbreaks would overwhelm ICU beds within a 10-mile radius and outbreaks over a 90-day period.⁵

We demand that our federal, state and local officials take proactive and appropriate steps to protect public health and safety, especially at this critical time. We remind Members of Congress of their fiduciary duties to all of their constituents and the important oversight role they play with respect to federal agencies. We further call on local and state officials to proactively engage with public health authorities in the state of California and clarify the appropriate course of action required to defend our communities.

Lastly, our networks call on our elected officials, the press and our community partners to document the explicit violations of public health standards and protocols by ICE and challenge their illegal activities in every manner possible.

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¹ See ICE Pandemic Response Requirements page 11

² ICE Performance-Based National Detention Standards (PBNDS) for 2008 and 2011

³<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/correction-detention/guidance-correctional-detention.html>

⁴ <https://www.kqed.org/news/11832472/people-are-terrified-sf-judge-orders-covid-19-testing-at-ice-facility>

⁵ Modeling COVID-19 and Its Impacts on U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Detention Facilities, 2020 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7228433/>