

Protecting our Sacred Spaces

As many know, the Trump administration has ordered Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to no longer recognize “sensitive locations” like schools, hospitals and churches when seeking out and detaining immigrants. This has had a chilling effect. Immigrants, regardless of immigration status, are fearful and are avoiding school, doctors’ appointments, and church. Even food banks and other charitable outreach programs at churches and other faith communities are seeing a drop.

The Episcopal church has joined an interfaith lawsuit challenging this recission of protective guidelines. The suit says that ICE actions around places of worship without a judicial warrant restricts the free exercise of faith guaranteed by the First Amendment and Religious Freedom Restoration Act and prevents people of faith from living out the Biblical mandate to welcome the stranger.

For many years, while the law did not explicitly protect churches and other faith communities from raids, ICE generally avoided making raids and arrests at these sensitive locations. All that has changed. The lawsuit is one method of trying to restore our faith-based protections. These ICE actions directly impinge on our freedom to practice our religion free from fear and repression.

The change in policy is already stoking fear. A Honduran man was arrested during a church service in Tucker, GA. Food banks and clothing closets are seeing a decline in clients as people fear ICE will arrest those going to churches seeking charitable services. You can read more about this here: <https://religionnews.com/2025/01/28/in-congregations-fear-misinformation-and-preparation-after-ice-policy-change/>

Our sacred spaces need to be safe spaces for those who want to worship with us. Our acts of love and service need to be protected so those most in need can access them. What can we do?

And an actual law has been reintroduced in both Houses of Congress by 53 members of both parties. The **Protecting Sensitive Locations Act** would protect immigrants at these sensitive locations from ICE raids. The original legislation never made it out of committee. The current situation on the ground has made getting this law passed absolutely crucial. Already 580 organizations across the nation have signed on to support this law, including MI Poder, the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center and the Michigan League for Public Policy.

What Can You Do? There are many ways to support this legislation.

- 1) Hold a letter writing campaign at coffee hour in your church, asking your local Congressional representative and our two Senators (Peters and Slotkin) to sign on to this bill.
- 2) Call the offices of your local representative and Senators to urge support of this bill. Hold a training session for your parishioners in how to call your reps.
- 3) If you are part of an ecumenical or interfaith organization, work together with those groups to build support.
- 4) Try to arrange an appointment with your rep or a staff member to discuss this legislation. Take other clergy people (of any faith or denomination) with you.
- 5) Learn more about this legislation at the Center for Law and Social Policy: <https://www.clasp.org/publications/fact-sheet/protecting-sensitive-locations-act-of-2025/>
- 6) Learn about the lawsuit against ICE and the Department of Homeland Security at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/publicaffairs/episcopal-church-joins-religious-freedom-lawsuit-challenging-ice-enforcement-actions-in-churches/>

If you are interested in building a coalition across the Diocese to work on ways to protect immigrants and refugees, email The Rev. Kit Carlson, pastorkitcarlson@gmail.com.