

San Diego children left to fend for themselves after immigrant parents arrested by US Border Patrol

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In a chilling and shameless display of the Trump administration's escalating attacks on immigrant workers a San Diego family was broken up by US Border Patrol agents in front of their home last week, leaving four children to fend for themselves.

The parents, Francisco Duarte and Rosenda Pérez, have both lived in the United States for over 20 years since emigrating from Mexico. They sold ice cream in National City, a suburb of San Diego, adjacent to the US-Mexico border.

They have no criminal record and the CBP has been forced to admit that no criminal charges have been filed. Despite this Duarte and Pérez have been charged with immigration violations and are being held at the nearby Otay Mesa Detention Center pending deportation hearings.

Francisco Duarte Jr. told local media how his father, Francisco Sr., was apprehended on May 23 as he walked out of the family home to pick up a newspaper at a nearby convenience store. He was handcuffed by Border Patrol agents and put into an unmarked car. Pérez walked out of the home to see what was going on and was arrested.

Francisco Jr. had been woken up to the sound of his two younger sisters crying who explained that their parents were in handcuffs. His mother had requested that Francisco, 19, assume care of his three younger siblings who are minors. Francisco told local media that he could not get any information from the government agents arresting his parents. He asked if they had an arrest warrant for his father only to be told by the officials that they did not need an arrest warrant.

The family called the National City Police Department who confirmed that the family was being

held by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). A rally in support of the family was held outside of the Otay Mesa detention facility last Friday where the parents are currently being held.

The arrests of Duarte and Pérez triggered a panic in National City, a majority Hispanic and immigrant community. Rumors circulated that the parents had been detained while dropping their children off at school. The National City Elementary Teachers Association was forced to release a statement demanding ICE and Border Patrol "cease and desist" targeting immigrant families. A National City mother was deported in April to Tijuana, leaving her son behind.

In California, more than 750,000 students, one in eight, have at least one parent who is undocumented according to Education Trust-West. While most of these students are citizens, at least 250,000 are themselves undocumented.

In February, San Diego Unified Superintendent Cindy Marten sent a letter to parents reassuring them that ICE was not allowed to conduct raids on school campuses. Earlier in the month a resolution was passed reaffirming the district's stance that its schools are a safe space for students, regardless of their immigration status.

These resolutions have not stopped the Border Patrol or ICE agents from parking near schools, churches, and even town halls in hopes of intimidating and arresting undocumented immigrants, deliberately cultivating a sense of confusion and terror in working-class communities.

In March, ICE agents arrested Rómulo Avelica-González in Los Angeles as he was dropping off his

daughter at school. The incident would have never become well known if the man's daughter did not record a video on her cell phone, which quickly went viral on the Internet. ICE told the *Los Angeles Times* that because the arrest did not take place on school grounds it followed department protocol.

In San Diego, staff members at one elementary school in the working-class suburb of City Heights told the *Voice of San Diego* how they have noticed ICE trucks parked near schools leading to a sharp decline in parents who are willing to engage with teachers and attend school functions.

One undocumented parent, who asked to remain anonymous due to fear of raids, told the news site how bringing her children to school had become a tremendous source of anxiety. "I rarely go drop off my kids at schools in the morning because I go into work at 4a.m., but when I do go I fear that it will be my last day here," she said.

Since the Duarte family has been broken up, the children have mounted a campaign demanding answers from authorities and the return of their parents. They uploaded a video on Youtube describing their ordeal, which has since been viewed over 20,000 times.

In the video, Francisco's 17-year-old brother describes how his father was "just hunted because they didn't have papers." His younger sister also spoke up saying, "We can't let this become something that is normal in our community."

The family has also set up a GoFundMe account, a site for donations, to help with living expenses and legal fees. They have been met with overwhelming support raising almost \$70,000 in less than a week.



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