

Oregon residents block unmarked ICE buses carrying detained immigrants

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On Wednesday, a large crowd of protesters blocked the path of unmarked buses carrying two detainees, identified by activists as long-time residents Josué Arturo Cruz Sanchez and Marco Zeferino, by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The standoff lasted around 12 hours in Bend, a town in central Oregon with about 100,000 residents. Eventually, dozens of federal agents were deployed to disperse the protesters using pepper spray.

The standoff between protesters and federal agents began when Luke Richter, president of an activist group in Oregon, heard that ICE was operating in the city. He found the two unmarked buses and blocked their path in a hotel parking lot, livestreaming the event on social media. After hours of standing in front of the buses, hundreds of people began showing up to oppose the arrests and blocked the buses from leaving.

In a statement put out by the families of the two men and read aloud on Facebook Live, the family members said: “Consider the emotional trauma being inflicted not only on us as adults, but also on our children who witnessed this injustice. We are hard-working members of the community that have lost our jobs due to COVID and our husbands are put at risk daily.” They continue, “We are simply trying to provide for our families, but because of the color of our skin and because of our country of origin that does not justify what has happened here today. False information is being put out regarding their criminal records and what is not being told is that we are human beings trying to survive and provide for our families. The treatment of being detained without questions or rights, being deprived of food and water, refusal of wellness checks, is an injustice.”

Speaking to the *New York Times*, Janet Sarai Llerandi Gonzalez, leader of a local support organization for

Latinos and Hispanics called “Mecca Bend,” said the children of those who were detained came to the scene and pleaded with the bus drivers to let go of their fathers.

Once the federal agents were deployed to the scene, the children of the men were violently tossed to the side. The agents, riot equipped and heavily armed, then dispersed the crowd with pepper spray, moved through the crowd of protesters and snatched up the two detainees from the buses along with the bus drivers.

Why these two men were detained and put in unmarked cars is unknown. A statement tweeted by ICE indicated that the men had “a history of criminal violent behavior.” When the federal agents arrived at the scene, one person with a bullhorn said one of the men had a life-threatening medical emergency and should be removed from the bus.

According to the Bend police, ICE was operating without the help of the local authorities, who weren’t involved in their operations, stating that “We do not use funds or personnel or equipment to enforce federal immigration laws or to detain people based on immigration status. This is consistent with Oregon law and department policies.”

District Attorney John Hummel went to the protest Wednesday to talk to the federal agents but could not get an answer as to who was being detained and why. Speaking to the *New York Times*, he said that instead of deescalating the situation, federal agents called for backup from Portland and Seattle to reclaim the detainees. In an attempt to distance themselves from ICE, Hummel said the governor, mayor and the police chief “have been trying to broker a resolution with DHS, to no avail.”

The two men, Cruz and Zeferino, were separately driving to work on Wednesday morning when they

were stopped by ICE agents and taken into custody at a gas station. Cruz is a painter and Zeferino works at a restaurant. Both men have lived in Bend for 15 years and have children born in the US. Neither of the men had been presented with an arrest warrant when they were detained.

Bend is only a few hours' drive from Portland, where daily demonstrations and protests have taken place since May after the murder of George Floyd. Protesters in Portland have been subjected to violent police-state attacks, with federal paramilitary forces from multiple agencies using "crowd-control" devices such as tear gas, flash grenades and rubber bullets, which have critically injured protesters, to stop the peaceful demonstrations.

The detention of the two men has led to lawyers from the Portland-based Innovation Law Lab filing a motion in federal court in an attempt to block the deportation of the Bend detainees.

The large group of protesters that came to the scene in Bend at a moment's notice shows the hostility and contempt youth and workers have towards ICE and the brutality inflicted against immigrants and refugees.



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