

FBI arrests Milwaukee County Circuit Court judge for obstructing ICE raid on undocumented immigrant

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On Friday morning, the Trump administration escalated its assault on constitutional government by instructing the FBI to arrest a county judge in Wisconsin based on allegations of obstruction and shielding an immigrant from being arrested by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers.

The arrest has sent shock waves throughout the judicial system and immigrant communities and brings to a new level the authoritarianism of the Trump White House.

County Circuit Court Judge Hannah Dugan was taken into custody by FBI agents at approximately 8:30 a.m. on the grounds of the Milwaukee County Courthouse. She has been accused of assisting Eduardo Flores-Ruiz, an undocumented immigrant facing misdemeanor domestic battery charges, to evade arrest by ICE agents, who were waiting to detain him after his court appearance on April 18.

A criminal complaint filed by Special Agent Lindsay Schloemer of the FBI alleges that Judge Dugan directed Flores-Ruiz and his attorney to exit through a restricted jury door, bypassing a team of six ICE agents, who were waiting in the public hallway of the courthouse. Flores-Ruiz was ultimately apprehended by ICE agents outside the courthouse after a brief pursuit on foot.

The criminal complaint against Dugan states that she was visibly angry about the presence of ICE agents in the courthouse, describing the situation as “absurd” and responding to the agents with what witnesses called a “confrontational, angry demeanor.”

An official press release from the US Department of Justice says that Dugan has been “charged with obstruction of proceedings before a department or agency of the United States, which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison, and concealing a person to prevent arrest, which carries a maximum penalty of one year in prison.” Both charges are federal felonies.

A now-deleted social media post by FBI Director Kash Patel accused Dugan of “intentionally misdirecting federal

agents away from the subject to be arrested in her courthouse, Eduardo Flores-Ruiz, allowing the subject—an illegal alien—to evade arrest.” Patel further claimed that Dugan’s actions “created increased danger to the public.”

Making clear the fascist political agenda behind the apprehension of Judge Dugan, Attorney General Pam Bondi made an appearance on FOX News to boast about the FBI action and threaten other members of the judiciary, as well as the general public for opposing the Trump administration’s assault on the rights of immigrants.

In an appearance on FOX News channel’s “America Reports,” Bondi said:

What has happened to our judiciary is beyond me. The [judges] are deranged is all I can think of. I think some of these judges think that they are beyond and above the law. They are not, and we are sending a very strong message today ... if you are harboring a fugitive ... we will come after you and we will prosecute you. We will find you.

Bondi’s emphasis that “no one is above the law” and that obstruction of immigration enforcement “will not be tolerated” is especially revealing given that, as head of Trump’s Justice Department, she has repeatedly lied about the disappearing of immigrants and the violation of their First, Fourth and Fifth Amendment rights.

Bondi has been at the center of Trump’s blatant refusal to abide by court decisions, including the April 10 decision of the Supreme Court that the White House must “facilitate” the return of Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia after he was illegally put on a plane and sent to a prison in El Salvador.

Judge Hannah Dugan has served on the bench in Milwaukee County Circuit Court since her election in 2016. She was reelected in 2022. Born in 1959, Dugan was

recognized for her advocacy for the poor and vulnerable prior to her judicial role. She holds a law degree from the University of Wisconsin Law School, as well as a Bachelor's degree in legal studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Master's in American Studies from Boston College.

Before becoming a judge, Dugan worked extensively with legal aid organizations, including the Legal Aid Society in Milwaukee and Legal Action of Wisconsin, providing legal services to those unable to afford representation. She also led nonprofit organizations, such as Catholic Charities of Southeastern Wisconsin, where she helped refugees and low-income families, and served as interim director of Milwaukee's Social Development Commission, an anti-poverty agency. Dugan has taught law at Marquette University and Seattle University and served as president of the Milwaukee Bar Association.

In a statement issued through her attorney, Dugan said:

Judge Hannah C. Dugan has committed herself to the rule of law and the principles of due process for her entire career as a lawyer and a judge. She has retained former United States Attorney Steven Biskupic to represent her. Judge Dugan will defend herself vigorously and looks forward to being exonerated.

Her attorney, Craig Mastantuono, added during Friday's hearing:

Judge Dugan wholeheartedly regrets and protests her arrest. It was not made in the interest of public safety.

On Friday afternoon, several hundred people assembled outside the courthouse in Milwaukee and chanted, "Free the Judge Now!" and "Drop the Charges!" News reports said the judge was released from federal custody on Friday after her appearance in court. Her arraignment has been scheduled for May 15 at the federal courthouse in Milwaukee, where she is expected to enter a not guilty plea.

As it has done throughout Trump's assault on immigrants, the corporate media has focused on allegations against Flores-Ruiz, repeating government assertions that he is an "illegal immigrant." It has accepted uncritically the details in the complaint filed by the FBI against Judge Dugan.

Responding to the arrest of the judge, Congresswoman

Gwen Moore, Democrat of Wisconsin's Fourth District, posted a mealy-mouthed statement on social media, declaring that "this arrest has all the hallmarks of overreach."

Democratic Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers issued a statement denouncing the Trump administration for "disobeying the highest court in the land and threatening to impeach and remove judges who do not rule in their favor."

None of the Democrats stated that the arrest of Judge Dugan was a further step toward establishing an authoritarian dictatorship in the US, where there are no laws except the dictates of the would-be Führer, Donald Trump.

The arrest of Judge Dugan takes place within the context of efforts by the Trump administration to criminalize opposition to its anti-immigrant agenda and undermine what remains of the independence of the judiciary at the local, state and federal levels. By targeting a sitting judge, the White House is attempting to send a clear message that resistance to its federal immigration policies, even on the basis of due process or judicial discretion, will be met with the full force of state repression.

Also on Thursday, a former judge and his wife were taken into custody when authorities raided their home in Las Cruces, New Mexico, after they were accused of harboring a Tren de Aragua gang member.

Video of the arrest of former Dona Ana County Magistrate Judge Joel Cano and his wife, Nancy Cano, was circulated widely on social media. ICE agents executed a search warrant and a probable cause arrest warrant, and both were taken into custody as part of an investigation led by Homeland Security Investigations.

Joel Cano was charged with tampering with evidence, and Nancy Cano was charged with conspiracy to tamper. Cano resigned as judge in March following accusations that the couple had hosted Cristhian Ortega-Lopez, an undocumented migrant from Venezuela, in their home. Responding to the allegations, Cano said the claims were "sensationalism at the highest possible level."

These attacks are an assault not just on immigrants but on the democratic rights of the entire population, above all, the working class.



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