

# DHS agents imprison Guatemalan mother at hospital during labor and birth, provoking public outcry

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On April 28, Erika Mateo, a 24-year-old Guatemalan woman who was 9-months pregnant, was found wandering alone in the Arizona desert after crossing the Mexican border and seeking asylum in the US.

Mateo was immediately taken into custody and, after going into labor the following morning, was hospitalized at Tucson Medical Center (TMC) under armed guard by the Department of Homeland Security. She was immediately placed under expedited removal—a process to quickly remove her without the right to have her case brought before a judge.

After giving birth, Mateo was swiftly transferred into the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents who stood watch outside her hospital room. During her recovery she was denied access to her attorney, family and friends. Mateo stated that she refused to let go of her newborn baby, Emily, for fear that she would be taken away.

Mateo had traveled 2,000 miles to escape a violent and unsafe living situation in Guatemala, where she feared for her own life and that of her unborn baby. After crossing the US-Mexico border she was accidentally separated from her group and got lost in the Sonoran Desert. Mateo told *USA Today* that she feared she was going to die. “I walked and walked, but everything looked the same,” she said. “It was like walking in place. I would burst into tears pleading with God to help me find a way or for someone to find me.”

Mateo’s attorney, Luis Campos, told reporters that when he attempted to visit her at TMC, ICE agents blocked the entrance to her hospital room, stating she was in their custody and was allowed no visitors. They told Campos he needed a signed G-28 form naming him as her attorney before he could see her. Campos

told the ICE agents that he had the form with him but needed her signature; the agents continued to bar his entrance to the room.

On May 3, hundreds in the community gathered outside the hospital to protest Mateo’s treatment and imminent deportation. After public outcry demanding her release from ICE custody, federal authorities reversed their decision to immediately deport the mother. She was released from ICE custody and she and her newborn daughter are now in Phoenix awaiting a court appearance in front of an immigration judge to make her case for asylum.

The protests in defense of Mateo explode the myth, whipped up by the Trump administration, that US-born workers as a whole are hostile and resentful of the efforts of immigrants to live and work in America. The unified support for Mateo also bucks the efforts by factions of the US ruling elite to elevate race and nationality as insurmountable divisions that pit workers against one another.

Healthcare workers have expressed concern over the attacks on immigrant patients and coworkers. At the end of March, hospital supply chain manager Aditya Harsono, was seized at work in Marshall, Minnesota by ICE after his student visa was secretly revoked by DHS. Protesters gathered outside the hospital in the following days to raise their opposition to Harsono’s seizure.

While workers are eager to fight against the attack on immigrants, this struggle must be taken out of the hands of the trade union bureaucracy. In the case of Aditya Harsono, the Minnesota Nurses Association released only a weak statement and did not make any effort to mobilize any of its 22,000 members in

Harsono's defense.

The National Nurses United (NNU), the largest nurses trade union with over 225,000 members, has not made a serious attempt to fight against the Trump administration's attack on immigrants and public. In one pathetic statement from January after Trump lifted prohibition of immigration raids on hospitals, the NNU stated, "Nurses *call on the Trump administration* to keep hospitals and other health care facilities, as well as other previously protected areas such as schools and places of worship, safe for all people" [emphasis added].

Rather than pleading with hospital administrators, Democrats, or even Trump himself to change their stance, nurses and other workers need to unite and launch a nationwide campaign against Trump's policies. This effort demands the creation of a network of grassroots committees, separate from both major political parties and traditional union leadership.

Workers must break free from the stranglehold of the trade union apparatus and pseudo-left figures like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who have remained silent on the mass deportations that are being carried out across the country. They function as instruments of the capitalist state and work to corral the working class into the dead end of bourgeois politics.

There is no section of the political establishment that is offering a way forward. The Democratic Party is not an opposition party to dictatorship—it is its enabler. Over the past 100 days, the Democrats have passed Trump's spending bill to keep his government running and pledged to "work together" with the would-be Fuhrer. Forty-six Democrats in the US House and 32 in the Senate voted for the fascistic Laken Riley Act, which mandates federal immigration police to detain immigrants, without access to bail, if they are convicted or simply accused of burglary, theft, larceny or any shoplifting-related offenses.

As Erika Mateo's case demonstrates, the urgent task is the building of a revolutionary leadership in the working class to guide the struggles that lie ahead. Workers must be armed with a socialist and internationalist perspective aimed at abolishing the capitalist system. The building of rank-and-file defense committees in every workplace, factory, school and neighborhood is what is required to defend the democratic rights of immigrants, workers and students

that are coming under attack.



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