

# Mahmoud Khalil is released from ICE detention but faces new charges in immigration court

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Mahmoud Khalil, the Columbia University graduate and Palestinian rights activist, was released from ICE custody in Jena, Louisiana, at 7:00 p.m. local time on Friday, after more than three months of detention by the Trump administration.

His release came a few hours after a ruling by US District Judge Michael Farbiarz of the District of New Jersey who rejected the arguments of the White House and found that Khalil, a lawful permanent resident, was neither a flight risk nor a danger to the community.

The judge described the government's actions as "highly unusual," and he wrote:

There is at least something to the underlying claim that there is an effort to use the immigration charge here to punish the petitioner—and of course, that would be unconstitutional.

Judge Farbiarz ordered that Khalil "shall be released from immigration custody today." He was released on bail, with conditions including the surrender of his passport and restrictions on his travel to New York, New Jersey, Michigan, Washington D.C. and Louisiana, where his immigration proceedings will continue.

He still faces charges in immigration court, brought by the Trump administration. The White House is seeking his deportation based on allegations of omissions in his green card application. These charges were brought after Trump's initial "national security" justification was struck down by the court.

Friday's decision follows Judge Farbiarz's earlier June 11 ruling, which blocked the government from detaining Khalil based solely on Secretary of State Marco Rubio's determination that his presence threatened US foreign policy. Farbiarz found that such a justification could not override constitutional protections, and that using immigration law to retaliate against Khalil's protected speech was likely unconstitutional.

The government then shifted its justification to alleged

misrepresentations on Khalil's immigration paperwork, but Farbiarz dismissed this as insufficient grounds for ongoing detention, noting that such cases "are virtually never" prosecuted in this manner.

Upon stepping out of ICE detention, Khalil addressed reporters and supporters:

While justice has finally been served, it is long overdue. This should not have taken three months. Trump and his administration picked the wrong person for this situation. No one should be detained for protesting genocide or for standing up to Columbia University.

He added:

My priority now is to get back to my wife and son. Although justice prevailed, it is very long overdue. Now I can actually hug him and Noor, my wife, without looking at the clock.

Khalil's wife, Dr. Noor Abdalla, who gave birth to their son while Khalil was in detention, expressed her relief over the ordeal her family endured:

After more than three months we can finally breathe a sigh of relief and know that Mahmoud is on his way home to me and Deen, who never should have been separated from his father. ... We know this ruling does not begin to address the injustices the Trump administration has brought upon our family, and so many others the government is trying to silence for speaking out against Israel's ongoing genocide against Palestinians. But today we are celebrating Mahmoud

coming back to New York to be reunited with our little family, and the community that has supported us since the day he was unjustly taken for speaking out for Palestinian freedom.

She recounted the experience:

My husband was taken away from me in the middle of the night. It was one of the most terrifying times of my life. I don't think I've ever experienced anything scarier than that.

White House spokeswoman Abigail Jackson condemned the judge's decision to release Khalil. She said he should be deported for "conduct detrimental to American foreign policy interests" and fraudulently obtaining a student visa. Jackson also claimed:

There is no basis for a local federal judge in New Jersey—who lacks jurisdiction—to order Khalil's release from a detention facility in Louisiana. We expect to be vindicated on appeal.

Judge Farbiarz's order was rooted in constitutional protections against arbitrary detention and retaliation for the exercise of free speech. In his earlier, extensive June 11 opinion, Farbiarz had already concluded that the Trump administration's use of an obscure provision of the Immigration and Nationality Act—Section 1227—to detain and attempt to deport Khalil was "likely unconstitutional."

The judge found that the secretary of state's determination, invoked by Marco Rubio, could not lawfully override Khalil's rights as a permanent resident, nor could it be used to punish him for his political activism. "The Court finds as a matter of fact that the Petitioner's career and reputation are being damaged, and his speech is being chilled—and this adds up to irreparable harm," Farbiarz wrote.

Khalil's legal team, which includes representatives from the Center for Constitutional Rights, the ACLU, and other civil rights organizations, has been vocal in condemning the government's actions. They have emphasized the urgency of reuniting Khalil with his wife and newborn child, declaring, "Every day Mahmoud spends languishing in an ICE detention facility in Jena, Louisiana, is an affront to justice, and we won't stop working until he is free."

The attorneys also highlighted the broader implications of the case for free speech and due process. "The court's decision is the most significant vindication yet of Mahmoud's rights," said

Ramzi Kassem of the Center for Constitutional Rights. "This vindicates what Mahmoud has maintained since day one—that the government cannot detain or deport him based on Rubio's say-so."

Since taking office, the Trump administration has intensified its campaign against students who have taken part in protests opposed to the Gaza genocide and spoken out against the US-Israeli campaign of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the enclave. Khalil's detention on March 8, 2025, was the first under Trump's policy of targeting students involved in pro-Palestinian activism.

Other students, including Mohsen Mahdawi of Columbia University, Rumeysa Ozturk of Tufts University, Badar Khan Suri of Georgetown University and Momodou Taal of Cornell University, have also faced detention and deportation proceedings.

The administration's actions have been denounced as reminiscent of McCarthy era witch hunting tactics, with judges in related cases explicitly comparing the government's conduct to the 1950s Red Scare. The targeting of students for their political beliefs and activism represents a direct assault on the First Amendment and the principle of academic freedom.

Khalil's detention sparked an outpouring of public support and mass opposition to the Trump administration's attacks on democratic rights. Protests have been held in New York and Washington D.C., with students, academics and civil liberties advocates demanding Khalil's immediate release and an end to the persecution of pro-Palestinian activists.

The campaign against international and native students who have taken a stand against the Gaza genocide is part of a wider assault on immigrants and their democratic rights within the US. The Trump administration has used the methods of the Big Lie—including the claim that opposition to the Gaza genocide is "antisemitism"—to target not only undocumented individuals but also lawful permanent residents and even citizens engaged in political dissent.

The strategy is designed to intimidate and silence opposition to Trump's fascist policies both at home and abroad. By targeting individuals like Mahmoud Khalil, the administration is sending a chilling message to anyone who dares to speak out against injustice and war crimes. The political mobilization in support of Khalil demonstrates the broad support that exists within the public for fundamental democratic rights in the face of the rising threat of dictatorship.



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