

New Zealand woman and 6-year-old son detained by ICE

Tom Peters

13 August 2025

On August 12, media outlets in New Zealand reported that Sarah Shaw, an NZ citizen living in the United States, was currently imprisoned in an ICE detention facility, along with her six-year-old son Isaac. They have been illegally detained since July 24.

Sarah and Isaac were kidnapped by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) while seeking to re-enter the US after a brief visit to Vancouver, where Sarah had accompanied her other two children to the airport for a flight to visit their grandparents in New Zealand.

The case is an example of the regime of terror that has been unleashed by the Trump administration against immigrants. Every day, thousands of people are being arrested, imprisoned, separated from their families and deported, including many who are legal US residents or even citizens.

Sarah Shaw, 33, and Isaac are both legally entitled to live in the US, where she has lived for three-and-a-half years. Shaw is employed by the state of Washington at Echo Glen Children's Center, a rehabilitation centre for young people.

Shaw's friend Victoria Besancon told the *New Zealand Herald* she only discovered what had happened two days after Shaw had been detained. Besancon said, "It wasn't really until we reached out to our Washington State representatives that we even found out where Sarah was."

For almost three weeks, ICE had failed to disclose Shaw's location or to establish a court date. "It was about two-and-a-half weeks of basically legal-sanctioned kidnapping," Besancon stated.

Speaking to Radio NZ, Besancon said: "I remember her on the phone being absolutely panicked. She originally thought she was being kidnapped. ... They were put into a giant white van, there was no markers on it, and not a lot was explained to them, so she was

absolutely terrified."

They were transported thousands of miles to the Dilley Immigration Processing Centre in Texas, which is essentially a prison. They are in a room with five bunk beds and are only allowed to walk about the facility between 8am and 8pm.

Besancon told *Stuff* that Shaw was having "almost daily panic attacks" and that her son "doesn't understand what's happening."

Shaw's lawyer, Minda Thorward, told the media that Shaw believed her immigration status entitled her to travel back and forth across the US border, but there had been an administrative error in processing her documentation. In the past, she would have been granted permission to re-enter the US, without being imprisoned, while the paperwork issue was resolved.

Her son Isaac was imprisoned without any legal justification or pretext whatsoever.

The experience had taken a huge toll in legal fees and Besancon told the *Herald* Shaw had "completely drained her savings, and she's the only financial support she has within her family. She literally lost everything."

Thorward and Besancon hope that the situation can be resolved and Shaw and her son can be released in coming days.

Officials from New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Radio NZ on August 13 that they had only been made aware of Shaw's plight by the media coverage, after which they contacted Shaw. ICE did not inform Shaw of her right to seek assistance from the New Zealand embassy.

The right-wing New Zealand government's response has been muted. Foreign Minister Winston Peters, who leads the anti-immigrant NZ First Party, has not made any public statement on the callous and illegal

imprisonment of two NZ citizens, including a small child.

On July 27, a few days after Sarah and Isaac Shaw were arrested, Peters delivered an anti-immigrant tirade. Speaking to the *NZ Herald*, he declared that there were “concerns” in places like England about the number of migrants “who don’t salute the flag, don’t salute the values of the country, don’t salute the people who were there before them.” He demonised immigrants for “changing cities, changing centuries of development and social life, and people feel at risk because of it.”

While using the similar xenophobic and racist rhetoric to Trump, New Zealand’s National Party-led coalition government is strengthening its military and intelligence alliance with Washington, as part of the US-led preparations for war against China. On July 31, FBI Director Kash Patel visited New Zealand to open a new FBI office, which he said would “counter” the activities of China in the Pacific region.

Needless to say, Wellington did not raise any concerns with Patel about the Trump administration’s frontal assault on democratic rights, including its anti-immigrant rampage.

The NZ government’s claim that it knew nothing about the abduction of Sarah and Isaac Shaw until it was reported in the media strains credulity, given the close ties between the two countries.

On August 8, the Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE), the union covering Shaw’s workplace, finally issued a public statement calling for the release of Sarah and Isaac. Around the same time, Besancon set up a GoFundMe campaign to raise money for Shaw’s legal fees.

New Zealand officials remained silent for four more days until they were approached by the media for comment. Officials made perfunctory statements that they were investigating the detention of Shaw and her son, while refusing to condemn ICE’s illegal actions.

It must be added that the WFSE has done nothing beyond issuing its belated statement pleading for ICE to release the Shaws and appealing for donations to the GoFundMe campaign.

The union’s president Mike Yestramski said “our union stands ready to help and support them in any way possible. An injury to one is an injury to all.” Yet the WFSE’s 52,000 members have not been mobilised in

any industrial action to oppose the imprisonment of Shaw and her son.

Across the US, the union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party have worked together to suppress any effective action against the Trump regime as it rips up basic democratic rights and kidnaps migrants.

As the WSWS has explained, the fascistic assault on immigrants is aimed at scapegoating them for the deepening poverty and social inequality caused by the crisis of the capitalist system. The fight to defend immigrant workers, therefore, “can succeed only through the unified mobilization of the working class as a whole—black, white, native-born, immigrant, documented and undocumented alike,” as part of the fight for international socialism.

Workers must organise independently of the capitalist parties and in opposition to the pro-capitalist union apparatus, by building rank-and-file committees in every workplace, school and neighbourhood to oppose ICE’s deportation operations and prepare collective action to stop fascism and dictatorship.



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