

# Boston car wash workers seized by ICE amid intensified attacks on immigrants in Massachusetts

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Federal immigration agents descended in force on a car wash in the Allston area of Boston on the morning of Tuesday, November 4. Witnesses described "over a dozen vehicles" surrounding the business, with one worker saying they counted 17 vehicles. The car wash manager characterized the raid as a gross overreaction. "Why bring in an armored vehicle?" he asked. "What are we, terrorists?"

The militarized operation is the latest and most brazen offensive in the Trump administration's escalating war on the working class in the Boston area. The raid occurred around 9:30 a.m. while the car wash was open. As agents surrounded the business and blocked entrances, they told customers in their cars to leave. Nine workers were seized.

As of Wednesday, none of the nine workers have been identified or released. Coworkers and immigration advocates have confirmed that several of them held legal status, and valid work permits when they were detained. According to US Rep. Ayanna Pressley, all of them were documented.

Local resident Janet England, protested against the immigration raid outside the car wash the following day, holding signs that read: "Trump uses his ICE goons against innocent immigrants, this must stop!" and "ICE, hands off our neighbors."

In an interview with WCVB 5 on the kidnapping, England, referring to ICE said, "This is exactly what they do. They go to Home Depot, to places where people work hard. These are innocent people, no due process, this is anti-American, this is fascism."

Amanda Eisenhour, a volunteer with LUCE, a community network that monitors immigration enforcement, said she had met with family members of the workers. Eisenhour told the *Boston Globe*, "We're hearing that they're pressuring some people into signing paperwork," explaining, "They're pressuring some people into trying to self-deport. They're throwing everything at the wall, I would say, to try and get people to make decisions that are not good for them."

Eisenhour said agents prevented workers from retrieving

documents like work permits from their lockers, but instead "just took them." She added, "We can't say what every single person's exact status was, but certainly some people had documents and were not allowed to show them."

Car wash companies have seen an increase in the types of raids, like the one in Allston, because they are known to employ Latino workers. In Connecticut, several raids were made across the state. Last month, eight people were taken into custody during a raid at a car wash in Hamden, while others were seized in the towns of and Newington.

Car wash companies are also targeted because workers are working outdoors. Eisenhour said that the nine detained were the ones outside the car wash when the raid occurred. She said the immigration agents did not enter the car wash building and none of the workers inside were arrested.

"They don't want to deal with getting any kind of warrant or permission to go inside, so they target people who are outside," Eisenhour told the *Globe*. "That's why car washes across the country have become a new target—because their employees are largely outdoors, so they're much easier to target."

In September this year the Supreme Court legalized racial profiling when it ruled that agents may racially profile individuals suspected of being in the country without legal status. This allows race and other criteria to be used as a pretext for detention.

As the militarized workplace raids increase, there is concern across Massachusetts for what has been called a "school-to-deportation pipeline," which relies on the seamless integration of local and federal police power to terrorize immigrant communities. This was tragically shown by the case of Arthur Berto, a 13-year-old boy from Everett, who was arrested at a bus stop outside his school by Everett police and later seized by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The Everett police are the subject of demands for a state probe as the police transferred custody of the boy directly to ICE, rather than releasing him.

He was immediately transferred to the Northwest Regional Juvenile Detention Center in Winchester, Virginia, hundreds of miles from his family, where he remains after a remote hearing on Zoom in mid-October denied his bond.

Despite official denials and hollow promises from local politicians, a systemic integration of government agencies facilitates the targeting of immigrant children and their families. Mechanisms seamlessly connect local law enforcement and schools to federal immigration authorities.

The “school-to-deportation pipeline” functions through a simple but chilling process. When a minor is arrested and fingerprinted by local police, that information is uploaded to a national FBI database. ICE has direct access to this database, which effectively flags the youth for federal action, turning a local police encounter into the first step toward deportation.

As in Arthur Berto’s case, a Chelsea teenager was arrested for fighting at school in May. His father rushed to the school, and within minutes both the father and son were seized by ICE. The 15-year-old, originally from Honduras, was sent to an immigration detention center in Texas while his father was held at the Plymouth County Correctional Facility in Massachusetts. The father has a pending asylum case and was released in June. The *Globe* reports that it is unclear if the son remains detained, while another Chelsea High School student accused in the fight was sent to a detention center in California.

Local officials routinely insist that police do not hand people over to ICE, as with Everett Mayor DeMaria who insisted that his police force “did not hold the teenager [Berto] for ICE.” Yet he was forced to admit that federal agents appeared “after police entered his fingerprints into a national database.” Similarly, Chelsea City Manager Fidel Maltez said that police would “never call immigration on anyone,” a meaningless pledge when the automatic sharing of database information renders such a call unnecessary.

Michael Bradley of the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association claims that federal immigration is “not in our purview to enforce,” and that local police “can’t interfere with their operations.”

In practice, local law enforcement acts as a feeder system for the federal deportation apparatus. Advocates at Lawyers for Civil Rights have called for statewide legislation that would exempt minors’ fingerprint information from the database.

The ICE crackdown in the state extends far beyond individual arrests. Its strategic aim is to cultivate a pervasive atmosphere of terror that is disrupting communities, with public schools at the epicenter of the crisis.

The quantifiable impact on education is staggering. The Chelsea Public Schools district has lost approximately 350

students this year, marking the largest drop in enrollment in a decade. The enrollment drop has created a potential budget shortfall of \$6.6 million, which one school committee member called “catastrophic.” Enrollment of “newcomers,” or students new to the US, has plummeted by 74 percent.

Facing this federal assault, the local political establishment, dominated by the Democratic Party, has offered nothing but empty gestures. Their “sanctuary city” policies provide an illusion of protection while doing nothing to halt the underlying state machinery of repression. This failure is not a matter of incompetence but is rooted in the Democratic Party’s fundamental role: to manage the capitalist state and contain social opposition, not to lead a genuine fight in defense of immigrants.

The teachers’ unions, which are beholden to the Democrats, issue condemnations against ICE arrests of school pupils but has done nothing to mobilize workers against the assault on immigrants or any of the Trump administration’s attacks. Nothing has been done to mobilize the 117,000 members of the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) or the 25,000 members of the American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts (AFT MA).

The terror raid on the Allston car wash, the persecution of students in Everett and Chelsea, and the deepening crisis in the region’s public schools are not separate issues. They are interconnected expressions of a calculated ruling class policy aimed at the entire working class.

The strategic objective of this policy is to terrorize and atomize the most vulnerable workers, drive a wedge between immigrant and native-born workers, and suppress the development of a unified class struggle against the austerity agenda of the oligarchs.

The defense of immigrant workers and their families is the responsibility of the entire working class. It cannot be entrusted to the Democratic or Republican parties, or any other agency of the capitalist state. The only way forward is through the independent political mobilization of all workers—immigrant and native-born—united in a common struggle against the capitalist system, which is the root cause of war, dictatorship and the vicious persecution of immigrants.



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