

Violent ICE arrest of asylum seeker in Massachusetts causes seizure of father holding toddler

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US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents executed a violent traffic stop in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, on the morning of November 6, 2025, resulting in the arrest of asylum seeker Juliana Milena Ojeda-Montoya, and causing her husband to have convulsions and a seizure while he held their terrified and traumatized 18-month-old daughter.

The incident began around 7:00 a.m. when the family—Ojeda-Montoya, her husband Carlos Sebastian Zapata and their daughter Alaia—were surrounded by several federal vehicles as Zapata drove his wife to her job at a Burger King restaurant. Agents quickly began banging on their car windows and screaming at the couple.

Zapata told the *Boston Globe*, “I wasn’t letting go of my wife because they wanted to take her away.” As Zapata attempted to prevent agents from pulling his wife from the car, one officer “pressed on his neck” and hit him around his ribs. Zapata lost consciousness while holding his daughter in his arms.

Eyewitness video shows the 24-year-old father shaking in the driver’s seat while the toddler cries, causing horrified onlookers to yell at the immigration agents, with one crying out, “He’s having a seizure and they’re trying to rip the baby out of his hands,” while a Fitchburg police officer repeatedly shouts at the crowd “Back up!”

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which oversees ICE, immediately rejected the claim of excessive force. DHS Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin defended the operation, calling Ojeda-Montoya a “violent criminal illegal alien.” Zapata and his daughter were allowed to leave after Ojeda-Montoya was taken by ICE and transported to

Cumberland County Jail in Scarborough, Maine to await removal proceedings.

DHS officials publicly accused Zapata of “faking a seizure” to help his wife escape. McLaughlin claimed that emergency medical personnel who arrived at the scene “found no legitimate medical episode.” Zapata later stated he went to the hospital after the arrest and was found to have bruises on his body.

Zapata said agents threatened they would arrest both parents and turn their daughter over to state custody if Zapata did not agree to leave with the child. Zapata told the *Globe* that since the detention of his wife, his daughter is “traumatized,” missing her mother and asking for her constantly.

The couple, who are from Ecuador, entered the country without papers in February 2023 and have a pending asylum case and valid work authorization. Ojeda-Montoya was arrested based on a warrant related to a local charge of assault and battery with a dangerous weapon. Zapata insisted the situation had been “blown out of proportion” and that his wife was attending all her mandated court dates.

A vigil was held on Saturday, November 8, at Fitchburg City Hall in response to the ICE attack. Dozens of local residents attended, holding candles and signs with messages such as “Protect Our Neighbors! NO ICE in Fitchburg” and “Due Process is for Everyone, STOP violating Human Rights.” Attendees expressed outrage at the actions of ICE and the Fitchburg police.

This latest brutal assault takes place as the anti-immigration state machinery—expanded under both Democratic and Republican administrations—is ramped up in New England. The Fitchburg operation follows

the September “Operation Patriot 2.0,” where more than 1,400 individuals were arrested on immigration-related charges in Massachusetts alone. The escalation of such raids, the targeting of families and the disregard for due process is part of a coordinated campaign aimed at intimidating and terrorizing immigrant and working class communities.

Last week, ICE seized nine workers at a car wash in Boston after preventing them from retrieving their legal documents and work permits from their lockers. As of Friday, it was still unclear where the workers are being held and lawyers are being deprived of access to their clients.

Civil rights lawyers continue to call on the state to investigate the Everett Police actions in case last month of seventh grader Arthur Berto, who was arrested and transferred to ICE custody. The 13-year-old was sent 500 miles away to a detention center in Virginia.

There have been a reported 1,400 ICE abductions in Massachusetts in September. In the first seven months of 2025 there have been an estimated 2,500 ICE arrests across New England. Patriot 2.0 has provoked significant opposition and several protests across the region. A march through the city of Providence, Rhode Island drew some 6,000–8,000 people. More than 3,000 rallied at the state capitol in Augusta, Maine, while 2,000-plus protested in Concord, New Hampshire. Several hundreds gathered to protest outside the ICE regional field office in Burlington, Massachusetts, and hundreds protested in Attleboro and Salem, and in New Haven and Hartford, Connecticut.

Workers and civil rights advocates frequently turn out to protest the actions of ICE. In Fitchburg about 20 protesters gathered at the scene of the ICE raid, expressing their opposition and concern for the family being detained. The Fitchburg Police Department (FPD) responded to requests from ICE officers to manage the “hostile” crowd and maintain order during the operation, claiming they were “in danger” from the crowd.

While the FPD issued a statement claiming their role was only to “keep the peace” and that they do not enforce federal immigration laws, the police effectively acted as crowd control for ICE. Fitchburg Mayor Sam Squailia claimed that these “unannounced federal actions” place local police in an “impossible situation”

and that the lack of transparency limits their ability to manage the scene safely.

On Reddit, comments on r/FitchburgMS were overwhelmingly critical of the statement from the Mayor’s Office. One typical post reads:

“Regardless of how you want to frame it, the Fitchburg PD did assist in the arrest. They were the manpower for ICE holding back a righteously angry crowd. This was not an impossible situation. They chose to help ‘not the people of Fitchburg’ over the people of Fitchburg.”

Another post cites the statement “When federal agents report they are ‘in danger,’ our officers are obligated to respond” with the reply:

“The only people in danger during that ICE interaction were the people being targeted by ICE ... yet the FPD didn’t feel obligated to respond to that danger.

“I guess the word obligated means something different to them.”

Democratic US Senator Ed Markey issued a statement that condemned the “harrowing” incident and the agents who had “brutalized” the family, placing it within the context of the “nationwide mass deportation campaign,” while Rep. Ayanna Pressley called the video a “sickening example of Trump and ICE’s blatant disregard for humanity as they terrorize our families and communities.” Markey compared the use of such tactics to those employed by dictators.

But while Democrats posture as defenders of “rights,” they continue to fund, train and enable ICE agents and collaborate with local police, who invariably respond to ICE’s calls for backup during every “hostile scene.” The Biden administration maintained Trump’s first-term policies, expanding equipment, staffing and inter-agency coordination for federal immigration enforcement against the backdrop of the broader capitalist offensive against democratic rights which is now being brutally used by the Trump administration.



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