

Music and recording artists denounce ICE and defend immigrants at 2026 Grammys

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The Grammy Awards on Sunday, the annual event in which members of the Recording Academy recognize music and recording artists across multiple genres, became a platform for several award recipients to condemn Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and defend the rights of immigrants.

During the evening, several recipients used their brief time on stage to condemn the immigration dragnet carried out by federal agents in cities and towns across the country. Artists explicitly demanded “ICE Out,” thus identifying themselves with the mass protests and walkouts that are taking place against the Trump administration.

Media coverage of the ceremony at Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles acknowledged that immigrant rights and opposition to repression—not celebrity gossip—was a central axis of the awards program. Unlike previous award shows, where causes have sometimes been mentioned, the 2026 Grammys saw several important denunciations of the ICE crackdown.

By doing so, the artists who made statements were expressing the widespread public anger over the hundreds of arrests, raids and “disappearances” associated with the attempt by the White House to scapegoat immigrants for the deepening social, economic and political crisis of American society.

Awardees used their acceptance speeches to denounce ICE and express support for all immigrants, sometimes prompting CBS to censor them. Billie Eilish, accepting the Song of the Year Award, declared, “No one is illegal on stolen land,” before concluding with “F*ck ICE,” a phrase CBS bleeped from the broadcast.

She also said, “We just need to keep fighting and speaking up and protesting. Our voices really do matter, and the people matter.”

In the days before the show, Eilish had already described ICE on social media as a “federally funded and supported terrorist organization under the Department of Homeland Security,” in response to the killing of Good, and later condemned the shooting of Pretti, asking fellow celebrities

whether they would continue to remain silent.

Eilish has shared on social media a tribute to 32 people who died in ICE detention during 2025, noting that 2025 was one of ICE’s deadliest years and underscoring that these deaths were the result of policy, not accidents.

In Atlanta, at an event marking the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr in January, Eilish said, “We are witnessing our neighbors being taken away / abducted, peaceful demonstrators being attacked, facing violence and death, our civil liberties being eroded, funding for combating the climate crisis being redirected to fossil fuels...and access to food and healthcare becoming a privilege for the affluent rather than a fundamental human right.”

Bad Bunny, who won three Grammy awards and is slated to headline the Super Bowl halftime show on February 8, started his acceptance of the Album of the Year honor for “DeBÍ TiRAR MáS FOToS,” with the comment “Ice Out!” followed by, “We’re not savage, we’re not animals, we’re not aliens. We are humans and we are Americans.” Bad Bunny’s comments received a lengthy ovation.

British singer Olivia Dean, receiving Best New Artist, explained that she was “up here as the granddaughter of an immigrant” and insisted, “My existence is a testament to bravery, and those individuals deserve recognition. We are interconnected.” These remarks, which were clearly aimed against the anti-immigrant hysteria being promoted by the Trump administration, also received a warm response from the audience.

R&B artist Kehlani, honored before the broadcast for Best R&B Performance and Best R&B Song, returned to the microphone a second time to insist that the industry had a responsibility to stand with the persecuted. “Together, we are stronger in numbers, and we must voice our opposition to the injustices occurring worldwide,” she said, closing with a clear “F*ck ICE.”

On the red carpet and throughout the hall, Justin and Hailey Bieber, Kehlani, Joni Mitchell and many others wore “ICE Out” pins, while Bon Iver’s Justin Vernon attached an orange whistle to his lapel in solidarity with Minneapolis

observers who blow whistles to warn residents of ICE and CBP incursions.

The reaction in the hall showed that the anti-ICE sentiments were widely held. The visible sympathy among musicians and attendees contrasted sharply with the nervous posture of CBS, which is owned by David Ellison of Skydance Media, a close friend and wealthy political ally of Donald Trump.

Grammy host Trevor Noah delivered a sardonic barb at music artist Nicki Minaj who has emerged as a Trump supporter. Noah joked that Minaj was absent from the event because she was at the White House “discussing important issues” before going into a Trump imitation to mock the president’s vanity and thin-skinned authoritarianism regarding who has “the biggest ass.”

Later before introducing Billie Eilish’s win, remarking that Song of the Year was “a Grammy that every artist desires, almost as much as Trump wants Greenland,” before adding that with Jeffrey Epstein’s island gone Trump needed “a new one to hang out with Bill Clinton.”

This comment drew a 1:00 am response from Trump on his Truth Social platform, denouncing Noah as a “pathetic, talentless dope” and threatening to unleash his lawyers on the M.C. “Noah said, INCORRECTLY about me, that Donald Trump and Bill Clinton spent time on Epstein Island. WRONG!!!” Trump wrote, insisting he had “never been to Epstein Island” and vowing to sue Noah “for plenty of money” to, “have some fun” and “teach him a lesson.”

This explicit threat to haul a comedian into court for a joke is part of a systematic attempt by the administration to criminalize criticism and intimidate opponents through the machinery of the capitalist state.

The response of CBS and the wider corporate media functioned as accomplices in efforts to downplay the expressions of opposition to the attack on immigrants and democratic rights. In post-show commentary, CBS and other outlets highlighted fashion and ratings while framing the content as “emotional” or “divisive” rather than as a legitimate response to repression and violence.

Anonymous Recording Academy sources told the press that the Academy itself had not “taken a stance” and portrayed the interventions as the spontaneous views of individual performers, to separate the institution from the growing movement against ICE and CBP.

At the same time, the mainstream media coverage was compelled to acknowledge that the pins, whistles and coordinated messaging were organized and in direct response to the killings of Good and Pretti, reflecting a conscious effort among some artists to use their visibility against government policies.

The radicalization on display at the Grammys cannot be

separated from the broader expressions of outrage against the Trump administration, most sharply manifested in the conflict over Washington DC’s Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Since returning to the White House, Trump purged the Kennedy Center’s leadership, stacked its board with loyalists, made himself chairman and pushed through the renaming of the institution as the “Trump-Kennedy Center,” provoking widespread boycotts and cancellations by artists.

On Sunday, Trump announced that the center will be shut down for two years beginning July 4, supposedly for “renovations” to transform the building into a “World-Class Bastion of Arts, Music, and Entertainment.” This decision followed the cancellations by prominent artists and organizations angered by Trump’s takeover and the desecration of the original Kennedy memorial.

Trump’s closing of the institution has been widely perceived as an attempt to break the resistance of the arts community to the effort to centralize control and reshape programming in line with the reactionary politics of the administration.

The stance taken by Grammy performers in defense of immigrants and against dictatorship is part of the movement of musicians, actors and other cultural workers who refuse to legitimize the Trump-Kennedy Center and its takeover by the dolt in the White House.

In both cases, artists are seeking ways—however partial and politically heterogeneous—to oppose the fusion of state power, chauvinism and cultural life demanded by the ruling class in the epoch of deepening crisis and war.

The intervention of a relatively small number of artists at the Grammy Awards is an indication of growing opposition and political activism among a layer of musicians. While the official viewing audience numbers of the live broadcast are not yet available, the public condemnation of ICE and the willingness to speak out against Donald Trump in front of an audience of approximately 15 million people is significant.



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