

# University of Washington graduate student and his son deported, as immigration arrests surge statewide

Bryan Dyne  
12 April 2026

Kennedy Orwa, a PhD student in the University of Washington's (UW) Information School researching AI applications in health systems, was detained by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport on April 7 and deported the following day along with his 13-year-old son. Orwa is a member of the United Auto Workers (UAW).

Orwa, who is originally from Kenya, was returning to the United States when CBP officers directed him to retrieve his luggage from a location separate from baggage claim and then detained him. According to a GoFundMe set up to support Orwa and his son, CBP told both that they needed to return to Kenya and reapply for an F-1 visa. Neither was allowed to speak with a lawyer or their family and were put on a Delta Airlines flight the next day.

According to UAW Local 4121, CBP claimed that during the inspection process, Orwa "disclosed information about previously working without work authorization in violation of our laws," and that he and his son subsequently withdrew their application for admission and departed voluntarily.

The claim that anyone could "voluntarily deport" after being detained is absurd. Whatever the legal fiction invented by the Trump administration, Orwa was clearly intimidated by immigration officers into leaving the country, no doubt knowing that he and his son would likely be thrown into one of the many immigrant concentration camps in the US.

For its part, UW issued a statement saying it was "aware" of the incident and had "no reason to believe this questioning or re-entry status to the U.S. is related to the student's academic program at the UW." The administration said it had connected Orwa's family

with legal resources, the state's federal delegation and contacts at relevant embassies and consulates. It declined to comment further.

Seattle's mayor, self-proclaimed "socialist" Katie Wilson, has said nothing about the deportation of Orwa. Both Wilson and UW have long ties to the Democratic Party, which has played an integral role in Trump's deportation campaign. Under both Obama and Biden, the deportation infrastructure was massively expanded, and the Democrats have collaborated with Trump at every turn.

Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker from Macungie, Pennsylvania and candidate for president of the United Auto Workers, issued a statement denouncing both the actions of the Trump administration to deport Orwa and the inaction of the UAW national leadership.

The statement calls "on all UAW members—in auto plants, parts plants, and on campuses—to mobilize in opposition to this assault on immigrant workers and democratic rights." It notes that "the UAW International and President Shawn Fain have issued not a word to defend Orwa, oppose the deportation, or mobilize the membership against this assault on immigrant workers," connecting this to the UAW apparatus' "accommodation to Trump and his economic nationalist agenda."

The deportation of Orwa and his son is part of a broader and accelerating series of attacks by immigration officials against the working class in Washington state. According to data from the Deportation Data Project, immigration arrests in Washington jumped from 318 in the first quarter of 2025 to 744 in the same period of 2026, a 134 percent increase. Nearly half of those arrested had no criminal

records, and nearly two-thirds of arrests took place in neighborhoods and workplaces rather than through jail transfers.

Seattle-Tacoma International Airport and Boeing Field have emerged as central infrastructure for these operations. An analysis of Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) flight records by local television station KING 5 found more than 200 ICE-related flights arriving or departing Boeing Field in 2025 alone, with flights occurring roughly every two days. Transfers increased by nearly 240 percent over the course of the year. In January and February 2026, 26 ICE-related flights were recorded, compared to 16 in the same period of 2025.

KING 5 also reported that Ivan Guzman, a Shoreline father arrested in January while driving his toddler to daycare, was deported to Mexico within six days of his arrest. His employer raised more than \$40,000 to retain an attorney, but by the time legal help was secured, Guzman had already been transferred to El Paso and then deported.

Civil rights attorney Jennie Pasquarella of the Seattle Clemency Project described the situation to the news outlet, “When there is no transparency on where the person is, you don’t want to file a [habeas petition] and have it kicked out because it turns out the person was already sent to Texas or some other state.”

ICE is paying contractor CSI Aviation \$673 million this fiscal year to operate deportation flights nationwide. Some of its subcontractors include GlobalX, Eastern Airlines, Omni Air International and iAero/Swift Air. And new contracts are estimated to be worth \$1.5 billion.

Orwa is among the many graduate students being targeted by the Trump administration. Mahmoud Khalil, a Columbia University graduate student and permanent resident, was arrested by ICE and subjected to deportation proceedings. Rümeyssa Öztürk, a Tufts University PhD student, was arrested and detained. Cornell graduate student Momodou Taal was forced to leave the United States under threat of deportation after suing the Trump administration. None of these students has been accused of criminal conduct. All are being targeted for voicing their opposition to the policies of the American government, including the ongoing immigration dragnet and US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

While many academic workers are members of the UAW, the union bureaucracy has refused to take action to defend them. At Columbia University, where student workers voted 91.5 percent to authorize a strike, UAW Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla moved to block the action, threatening the local with receivership if members refused to abandon demands protecting non-citizen workers and restricting campus police collaboration.

At the University of California, UAW Local 4811 kept 40,000 academic workers on the job for nearly three weeks after their contract expired, defying a clear strike mandate, before forcing through a concessions agreement.

In his statement, Lehman called for the unity of all workers against the attack on immigrants. “Immigrant workers are not our enemies,” he said. “They are our coworkers, neighbors and fellow workers. They are people driven across borders by war, exploitation and social devastation, all of it produced under both Democratic and Republican administrations. The persecution of immigrants is a warning to every worker: The same state powers being tested against the most vulnerable will be used against all workers as the class struggle intensifies...”

Lehman concluded by calling on “workers, students and educators at the University of Washington, and all workers in the UAW and beyond, to oppose the deportation of Kennedy Orwa and his son. My campaign calls for the formation of rank-and-file committees in workplaces and campuses to cut across the isolation imposed by the bureaucracy, linking immigrants and US-born workers in united action against raids, deportations and all forms of repression.”



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**