

ICE killer remains free as witnesses to Houston shooting are held in immigrant prison

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Three construction workers imprisoned by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) after witnessing the murder of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo Tuesday morning have independently rejected the agency's claim that he attempted to run over a federal officer, describing instead an unprovoked fusillade by agents who surrounded the workers' van and opened fire from the side.

The eyewitness accounts, published Friday by the *Washington Post*, obliterate the official story issued within hours of the killing by the Department of Homeland Security. All three men said no agent was ever positioned in front of or behind Lorenzo's work van and that he never attempted to strike an officer or an ICE vehicle.

"They came in and started shooting from the sides," attorney Hugo Balderas-Ibarra said, summarizing the consistent accounts given separately by the three detained men.

In a handwritten statement, Jose Trinidad Rojas, 51, said the DHS claim that Salgado Araujo attempted to "weaponize" the van to run over agents "is a lie."

"It is impossible for them to say that they were going to get run over," he wrote. "There were no officers in front of or behind the vehicle. They were on the sides."

All three men, who are being held in an ICE concentration camp in Conroe, Texas, where they are being pressured to self-deport, recounted that Tuesday morning began like any other workday.

Security camera footage published by El Grito Media shows Lorenzo Salgado Araujo during the final ordinary moments of his life. At 5:54 a.m., before sunrise, he steps outside with his dog, prepares for the workday, walks to his white van and drives away.

He was not a "dangerous illegal alien," as the Trump administration portrays the immigrants targeted by its raids. He was a construction worker and father leaving home before dawn to provide for his family and build homes for others. Less than an hour later, ICE agents shot him to death.

The workers were traveling to a construction site after buying ice and water at around 6:30 a.m. As they stopped at a traffic light on Wayside Drive, they noticed an unmarked black SUV following them.

When the light turned green, the vehicle pulled onto the shoulder, accelerated past the van, cut in front of it and tapped its brakes. The vehicle displayed no markings identifying it as a government vehicle.

The threatening driving by the unmarked vehicle prompted Salgado Araujo to make a U-turn. According to the detained workers, red and blue lights were activated only after Lorenzo had turned around.

Salgado Araujo continued slowly onto Canal Street, where heavy construction restricted traffic. According to the witnesses, the van was traveling no faster than five miles per hour. It was at this point that ICE agents began to "weaponize" their own vehicles, ramming them into the

side of Salgado Araujo's van and surrounding it.

"Lorenzo thought we had lost them, but suddenly they surrounded us," Rojas wrote in a statement viewed by the *Post*.

An ICE agent then jumped from one of the vehicles, ran toward the van, yelled "Stop!" and immediately began firing through the passenger side, striking Salgado Araujo in the abdomen.

Victor Salgado, Lorenzo's 44-year-old brother, was seated in the passenger seat. "When he shot my brother, the gun was in front of my face," he told Balderas-Ibarra.

Despite suffering a grievous gunshot wound, Salgado Araujo managed to stop the van and place it in park. The workers said ICE agents continued firing even after the vehicle had stopped.

Rojas said agents violently dragged Salgado Araujo from the driver's seat, threw him to the ground and shackled his wrists and ankles. The detained men said Lorenzo cried out for help as he bled in the street.

As Lorenzo lay dying, an ICE agent taunted the workers. "Se querían escapar, ¿verdad?" Victor Salgado recalled the agent saying. "You wanted to escape, right?"

Newly released surveillance footage provides powerful visual confirmation of the detained workers' account. The video shows unmarked ICE vehicles moving against Lorenzo's van, with no visible flashing lights or audible sirens. One government vehicle appears to strike the side of the van during the confrontation.

Agents can then be seen positioned beside the van and running after it as it moves slowly down the street and comes to a stop. At no point does the footage show an agent standing in front of the van or facing any apparent danger of being run over.

The exterior video does not clearly capture the exact instant the shots were fired. Based on the van's movements, the eyewitness testimony and the agents' positions, Lorenzo may have been shot as he completed the U-turn or as agents approached the passenger side while the van was slowing to a stop.

What the footage establishes is that the agents were positioned beside the vehicle, not trapped in front of it, and were in no visible danger of being run over.

The courage of the three workers stands in sharp contrast to the cowardice of the Democratic Party. Rojas, Daniel Tirado Pantoja, 43, and Victor Salgado are speaking out while imprisoned by ICE, facing deportation and the possibility of retaliation from the agency whose agents killed Lorenzo.

While these workers risk their freedom and safety to tell the truth, Texas Democrats are sending letters and requesting investigations from the very institutions responsible for the killing and its cover-up. At a press conference Friday, Democratic Representative Sylvia Garcia said she had spoken with acting ICE Director David Ventura after "trying to reach

him for most of the week.”

Venturella admitted that neither Lorenzo Salgado Araujo nor his brother Victor was the target of the operation. The agents did not possess an arrest warrant signed by a judge. They were operating under an ICE “administrative warrant,” an internal civil immigration document issued by the executive branch itself without a finding of probable cause by a neutral magistrate.

Such a document does not carry the same legal authority as a judicial warrant. It does not authorize ICE agents to force their way into a home or other private area without consent, and it cannot transform an alleged attempt to avoid being detained into a license to kill.

According to Garcia, Venturella claimed ICE agents were carrying out a “targeted enforcement action” against a person with a final order of removal whom they believed had entered Lorenzo’s van. Yet more than 48 hours after ICE agents killed Lorenzo, Venturella could not identify the supposed target or say whether the name on the agency’s administrative warrant belonged to either Tirado or Rojas.

Garcia said the footage she reviewed showed that the pursuing vehicles were unmarked. She said she saw no flashing lights, heard no sirens and detected no other audible or visual warning identifying them as law enforcement.

“The cars were unmarked,” she said. “They did not have a siren. They did not have lights or noise.”

Garcia said she pressed Venturella to reconsider ICE’s use of unmarked vehicles. “If I’m being followed by a black SUV and I don’t know who it is, I too would be scared, and I too probably would not have stopped,” she said.

Her account corroborates the workers’ description of the initial pursuit and surveillance footage made public so far. Venturella reportedly promised Garcia that the three surviving witnesses would remain imprisoned at the ICE concentration camp in Conroe and would not immediately be transferred elsewhere.

Garcia described her conversation with Venturella as “respectful” and highlighted his promise that ICE agents would receive body cameras by the end of July. The acting ICE director is a former senior executive at GEO Group, one of the largest private operators of ICE detention centers and a major Trump donor.

He now heads an unaccountable federal police agency whose agents have killed multiple people without a single killer being brought to justice. In Lorenzo’s case, the agents involved were immediately removed from Houston, placing them beyond local scrutiny while ICE retained control over the witnesses and evidence.

In the same press conference, Representative Al Green called for an “investigation,” while taking pains to distinguish it from a prosecution. Green said he was asking the House Homeland Security Committee to “take up this cause” and had spoken with the committee’s ranking Democrat, Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, about investigating ICE at the federal level.

“If we don’t get the results we are looking for, we will have a shadow hearing here in Texas,” Green said. He also announced that he had sent a letter to the committee outlining a series of demands.

All of this amounts to the fact that the Democrats are doing less than nothing. They are channeling public outrage into letters, committee appeals and prospective hearings while the killer remains unnamed and free, the witnesses remain imprisoned and threatened with deportation, and ICE continues its kidnapping and murder operations without interruption.

The undocumented workers have already done more to expose the truth than the entire Democratic congressional delegation. They have called out the lies, described the ambush and placed themselves in danger by speaking publicly. The Democrats, by contrast, refuse to demand the immediate arrest of the shooter, the release and protection of the

witnesses, or the abolition of ICE.

Garcia and Green called for a “full independent investigation,” the same hollow demand issued after ICE and Border Patrol agents murdered René Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis. Six months later, the federal agents who killed the mother and the Veterans Affairs intensive-care nurse remain free.

The government has also obstructed Lorenzo’s family from recovering his body and arranging a funeral. In a report from the vigil, journalist Lidia Terrazas said ICE was demanding that family members submit biometric information to confirm Lorenzo’s identity before releasing his remains.

“They haven’t made it easy. They have made it very, very difficult,” said Juan Proaño, chief executive of the League of United Latin American Citizens. “We are demanding the release of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo’s body.” “He deserves a proper funeral,” Proaño added.

Lorenzo arrived at Ben Taub Hospital without identification and was initially classified as a “John Doe,” making it more difficult for his family to locate and claim his body.

According to reporting from the vigil, federal agents removed or withheld his identification before he was transported to the hospital. His family is also demanding the return of his cellphone, work van, tools and other possessions still held by the government.

The killing of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo was not an isolated act or the result of one “bad agent.” It was the product of a government policy that has unleashed masked and heavily armed federal agents into working class communities with orders to seize immigrants and with the assurance that they will face no consequences for violence and murder.

The murder of Lorenzo is part of a nationwide escalation of police state violence under the Trump administration. In Memphis, federal forces attached to the Memphis Safe Task Force killed two men within four days. Early Sunday morning, Tennessee National Guard soldiers shot and killed 20-year-old Tyrin Johnson during a foot pursuit, even though the official account does not allege that Johnson fired at the soldiers or police. On Wednesday morning, a Drug Enforcement Administration agent assigned to the same task force fired into a hotel room and killed 47-year-old Alfonso Ivy. No officer was injured in either shooting.

The Tennessee NAACP responded by appealing to acting Attorney General Todd Blanche to investigate the deaths of Johnson and Darius Chappell, a 34-year-old father of three who died in jail days after police shocked him with Tasers, dragged him by the hair and allowed a police dog to maul him while he lay on the ground. Its letter called for the Memphis Safe Task Force to be suspended.

The appeal is directed to Trump’s political hatchet man, former personal lawyer and acting attorney general, who has overseen the administration’s ongoing cover-up of the Epstein files and now commands the Justice Department agencies participating in the Memphis occupation.

ICE and Border Patrol are being developed into a national police force operating above the law. Immigrants are its first and most vulnerable targets, but the apparatus being constructed will be directed against the entire working class, regardless of citizenship status, including strikers, protesters and political opponents of the Trump administration and the financial oligarchy.

Justice for Lorenzo will not come through appeals to congressional committees, letters to ICE officials or investigations controlled by the same state responsible for the crime. Nor can the fight against ICE be separated from opposition to the broader military and police apparatus being built up under the Trump administration.

The working class must demand the immediate release and protection of the three witnesses, the arrest and prosecution of the ICE agent who killed Lorenzo, the return of his body and possessions to his family, the withdrawal of ICE from Houston, the removal of the National Guard from

Memphis and every American city, and the abolition of ICE and Border Patrol.

These demands must be joined with the demand for the withdrawal of the US military from the Middle East and every country occupied or threatened by American imperialism. The bombing of foreign populations and the deployment of soldiers, federal agents and militarized police into American cities are two sides of the same imperialist policy.



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