

“We’re not supposed to be living in terror”: Austin, Texas residents speak out after ICE shooting of Wilber Rafael Garcés Pérez

Our reporters
28 September 2026

About 160 people returned Sunday to the North Austin intersection where an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent shot 28-year-old Wilber Rafael Garcés Pérez one week earlier. Garcés Pérez, meanwhile, remains imprisoned at the South Texas ICE Processing Center in Pearsall with a bullet still lodged near his spine and is scheduled to appear at a federal hearing Wednesday.

The demonstration was one of a series of protests across Central Texas since the shooting. Protesters gathered Sunday outside the Pearsall detention center demanding Garcés Pérez’s release and surgery to remove the bullet. Students at Anderson High School walked out Friday, following walkouts earlier in the week at schools in Austin, Pflugerville, Del Valle and Hays County. About 400 students at Lamar Middle School left class Wednesday to protest the shooting.

Texas authorities have also begun making arrests over the protests. At least three people were arrested on trumped-up resisting-arrest and riot-related charges during the September 20 demonstration that erupted hours after the shooting. Six days later, Texas Department of Public Safety officers arrested Misael Ramos, a candidate for Austin City Council and member of the Democratic Socialists of America, while he was walking his dog.

Garcés Pérez, a Venezuelan immigrant who came to the United States in 2024, was working as a DoorDash driver on September 20 when an unmarked SUV drove alongside his car and attempted to hit him. He initially believed he was dealing with an aggressive driver. After learning that the men were federal immigration agents, he said he asked to pull over somewhere safely so that he could submit to detention. Instead, he said,

the vehicle struck his car again before an agent fired into him.

The bullet struck Garcés Pérez from behind. He was taken to Dell Seton Medical Center, while his whereabouts were concealed from his wife and attorney. He was discharged after only about four hours and transported roughly 135 miles to the Pearsall detention center with the bullet still in his body. After reporting severe pain and loss of movement on the left side of his body, he was returned to a hospital and subsequently sent back into ICE detention.

His attorney, Kate Lincoln-Goldfinch, has said Garcés Pérez suffers “extreme pain” and loss of movement and warned that he faced paralysis. A specialist later recommended surgery to remove the projectile, which fractured his collarbone and remains lodged in the upper part of his back near his spine. His legal team said last week that without surgery his mobility could be permanently affected. He remains detained ahead of Wednesday’s federal hearing.

Among those at Sunday’s demonstration was Enrique, an Austin-area resident who described the atmosphere produced by the immigration raids.

“Everywhere I go, I have to carry passport, documentation,” he said. “I have never ... seen this before. I don’t feel safe going out without documentation.”

Enrique brought his daughter to the protest. “I think it’s wrong having to carry documentation, passport, all that,” he said. “This is a free country, and we’re not supposed to be living in terror.”

“They are getting them from their work,” Enrique said. “They go on Home Depot. They go on the workplace.”

Workers told the *Texas Tribune* that ICE been detaining construction workers stopping at gas stations and stores before work. One restaurant worker said the operations had been taking place for about a month before Garcés Pérez was shot.

Enrique rejected the presentation of immigrants as a criminal threat. “The vast majority of those people are hardworking people that are contributing,” he said. “They’re not criminals.”

He said he had watched videos of parents being seized in front of their children, “their children crying,” despite having no criminal record. Turning the official language of criminality against the agents themselves, he said he felt more unsafe around those carrying out the raids than around the supposed criminals invoked to justify them.

“I don’t want to be one more of the statistics,” Enrique said. “That’s why I’m here to make our voice heard.”

The methods being deployed against immigrant workers have also reached far beyond those facing deportation. Keith Porter Sr. traveled to Austin after his son, 43-year-old Keith Porter Jr., was shot and killed on New Year’s Eve by off-duty ICE agent Brian Palacios at the Northridge, California, apartment complex where both men lived. His family has spent the ensuing months demanding that Los Angeles County prosecutors bring the case before a grand jury.

Porter Sr. told the *World Socialist Web Site* that his son had been firing a weapon into the air during the New Year’s celebration when Palacios emerged from his apartment.

“He saw my son with his back turned with a weapon pointed in the sky,” Porter said. “Instead of him approaching my son and saying anything about it, he just shot three times and hit my son in the back three times and killed him.”

The *Los Angeles Times* reported that detectives found evidence of two bullet impacts behind where Palacios was standing. A law enforcement source told the newspaper that the impacts supported the claim that Porter had fired toward him. Porter’s family maintains that he posed no threat. As of August, the district attorney’s office was still reviewing whether to bring charges.

For Porter, his son’s killing and the shooting of Garcés Pérez are bound up with broader questions of

agents and state power.

“If we had money, money in my family, we would see justice quicker,” he said. “We are not able to get quick justice because of the fact that, you know, we’re a poor family, pretty much.”

Asked what social force could oppose the attacks, Porter replied, “The power of the working-class people can change the world. I mean, they can move mountains.”

“This world was built by the working-class people,” he continued. “Working-class people plays a major part in this here, and we can bring on change because working-class people unite.”

Another young man interviewed at Sunday’s protest described the fear created by the use of masked agents and unmarked vehicles.

“The fact that they can come in unmarked vehicles, cover up their faces, I could never tell if it’s even a federal officer or a random person kidnapping you,” he said.

“I’m brown. They could just say I’m illegal one day, you know, and I’d have to prove it in court, lose my job in the process,” he continued. “Yes, I’m a citizen, but I still would live in fear. I don’t trust these people at all.”

He connected immigration to the economic and political conditions produced internationally, arguing that US policies abroad contribute to the conditions that force people to migrate. He then returned to the social power of workers themselves.

“At the end of the day, if the working class unite, then the power truly is in our hand,” he said. “Without our labor, without our brain and muscle, there’d be no ... corporations’ power. There would be no imperialism. There’d be none of this oppression.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact