

Guidance for Immigration Raids at Shelters, Drop-In Centers, and Other Sites Where People Experiencing Homelessness Stay or Receive Services

Adapted from [NHLC Guidance](#) & [NILC Guide for Employers](#)

This guide outlines what homeless shelters and other public service providers can do to best protect clients and staff should an immigration enforcement agent try to enter their facility. The Trump administration has ended a long-standing policy that discouraged immigration enforcement agents from conducting enforcement actions in “sensitive areas,” such as schools, medical facilities, places of worship, social service agencies, disaster relief sites, and public demonstrations. All levels of staff should be well-versed in these policies and practices, including front desk staff, security, case managers, and support staff.



This resource does not constitute legal advice and reiterates existing guidance. Specific facts and circumstances may make this guidance less useful or applicable. Information included in this guide is accurate as of its last update on September 3, 2025.

Preparing For Entry Attempts:

→ Designate point people on staff who are on-site and prepared to respond.

- Each location should have designated point people for responding to potential raids. These point persons should be well-versed in how to identify valid judicial warrants (more information in the *During Entry Attempts & Entry* section below) and other response protocols. These point people should be the first on-site to respond to federal agents who may arrive, and clients should know how and who to notify if Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or other federal agents arrive on-site. Staff should be prepared to verify any judicial warrants and exercise their rights to not consent to any searches not required by law.

→ Train your other staff to NOT TALK to agents.

- Train all workers to NOT allow federal agents to enter your workplace without a valid judicial warrant. A worker can say, “I can’t give you permission to enter. You must speak with my employer.” Train all workers to NOT interact with ICE or other federal agents beyond that communication. If agents have questions or requests, workers should say nothing, or reiterate, “You are not allowed to enter without a judicial warrant. Talk to my employer.”

→ Print and hang signs on entry points that state you will exercise your rights to ONLY comply with valid judicial warrants and that staff will require review of the warrant to verify its validity upon any attempts by federal agents to enter.

- For example:

printable sign here



“NO FEDERAL AGENTS MAY ENTER PRIVATE AREAS ONSITE WITHOUT A VALID JUDICIAL SEARCH WARRANT SIGNED BY A JUDGE OR WITHOUT QUALIFYING EXIGENT CIRCUMSTANCES. WE WILL REQUIRE YOU TO PRESENT THE WARRANT UPON ANY ATTEMPTS TO ENTER. [THIS ENTITY] WILL NOT PROVIDE ACCESS TO THE SITE AND ANY OF OUR CLIENTELE UNLESS REQUIRED BY LAW AND WE DO NOT CONSENT TO ANY SEARCHES.”

- Consider also posting dress code signs that prohibit full face coverings like ski masks.

→ Hang signage to demonstrate areas that are private. Consider marking them with “PRIVATE” signage, keep doors closed or locked, and consider policies that visitors and the public cannot enter those areas without permission.

- Generally, areas open to the public such as a reception area are legally open to immigration agents, and agents may enter these spaces without a warrant. However, agents must have a valid judicial search or arrest warrant to lawfully access any private or non-public areas.

- Examples of private areas can include areas where people sleep, private offices, and other spaces where the public are not allowed to walk in.
- Staff should clearly explain to clients why they are posting such signage to make clear it is intended to foster safety, and not to create an unwelcoming or institutional environment for the clients or their visitors.
- Consider designating all or most of the facility “Private” or “Non-Public Area” if members of the public are not allowed to walk in. No one can enter a private area of your facility without your permission or a judicial warrant. Being in a public area does NOT give ICE the authority to stop, question, or arrest anyone.
- Facilities should also post signs outside of facilities to alert outsiders of visitation hours and entry requirements. Consider requiring any visitors to the facility to register with a designated member of the facility staff before they can enter or remain on the grounds.
- For low/no barrier homeless shelters where the doors and space are open and accessible, facilities can still identify as “Non-Public” all spaces that are only open to those seeking shelter but not the general public.
- If access to a building is only via key/keycard or if the door is locked and you must be buzzed in, this almost certainly satisfies the requirements of private areas.
 - While these facts would support designation as a non-public space, consideration should still be given to having signage saying “Nonpublic Area” to deter ICE agents from disregarding staff instructions.

Best Practices for Client Data Collection & Retention:

- **Data minimization is a best practice (Note: do not destroy data before consulting counsel, see more below).**
 - Facilities and providers should collect only the personal information *necessary* to provide services and should avoid collecting unnecessary information.
- **Notify clients of the facility’s privacy policies.**
 - Ensure that clients are familiar with the facility’s privacy policy upon admittance.
- **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS): Be sure to inform all clients that they do not have to provide their Social Security number if they do not want to or do not have one.** Please consult with local counsel to determine whether your facility is subject to HMIS requirements.
 - The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) and its federal partners require some shelters to collect certain data to “better inform homeless policy and decision making at the federal, state, and local levels.”
 - All projects participating in HMIS, regardless of funding source, must collect the following information from everyone they serve: (1) Name, (2) Social Security number (or that the client refused to provide one), (3) Date of birth, (4) Race and Ethnicity, (5) Gender, and (6) Veteran Status.
 - Facilities should maintain sensitive client information, like Social Security numbers and immigration status, securely and for only as long as is legally required regardless of whether the information is disclosed by a client or collected by the facility.

Responding to Requests to Access Records or Documents:

Facilities should seek additional guidance regarding client data collection, retention, and disclosure if:

- they provide healthcare services or services to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, hate crimes, human trafficking, and other crimes;
- they are co-located with substance abuse treatment facilities; or
- they are covered under HIPAA.

Facilities should also seek guidance on the laws of the state they are operating in. Many state laws provide individuals in the state with greater control over the distribution of their personal information.

→ Designate a point contact person to respond to data requests.

- An administrator or supervisor should be designated to inform when a request is made to anyone at the facility.

→ Require a valid subpoena* before responding to any request for information.

- Generally, ICE cannot access a facility's records unless they have a validly executed subpoena (or potentially a search warrant). The facility should not turn over information absent a validly executed subpoena or search warrant that specifically identifies the information.
 - Facilities must respond to a subpoena within the time allocated on the subpoena. Failure to respond can result in adverse legal action.
- When responding to a subpoena, facilities are **only** required to turn over the specific documents requested, and **only if those documents are not privileged or protected by federal statutes like HIPAA**.
- If the facility receives a subpoena in person at the facility, the designated administrator or supervisor should inform the officer that they do not want to answer any questions and ask them to leave their contact information.

→ Notify clients of requests, when possible.

- If a client's immigration data has been requested, notify the client whenever possible.
- Staff should also document, but not respond to, any verbal or written requests for information by immigration authorities that are not supported by a subpoena or warrant.

→ Inform clients of their rights.

- Print and display ["Know Your Rights" Posters](#) (Exhibit 2 in NHLC Guidance) in a place where clients can see it.
 - Translate the poster into languages your clients understand, as you do other important notices. These posters tell clients what to do when they encounter ICE, whether in public or in their homes.
 - The most important advice to give clients is to **remain calm and assert their rights during any interaction with ICE**.

→ Do not destroy data.

Facilities generally cannot simply delete a client's personal information from their records. Doing so could violate privacy laws and potentially hinder the individual's access to necessary services.

- Most jurisdictions have laws protecting personal information, including that collected by homeless shelters, meaning they must handle data responsibly and not arbitrarily delete it.
- Because privacy laws vary by state, if a facility currently has unnecessary data or information reflecting client immigrant status that they want to delete, **they should consult counsel** for assistance in data and information minimization efforts.

What if an ICE agent requests access to records or documents regarding the facility's clients or staff?

1. Staff—preferably a designated supervisor—should inform agents that facility policy is to not release information without the client's consent, unless disclosure is required by judicial warrant, subpoena, or otherwise required by law.
→ **Staff should say, "I'm sorry but we can't release this information to you without a warrant or subpoena."**
2. If agents claim to have a judicial warrant or subpoena, staff should not release information without consulting a supervisor. Staff—preferably a designated supervisor— should request a copy of the warrant or subpoena and ask for the agents' contact information.
3. **If such information is requested or if a subpoena is received, a supervisor should immediately contact counsel.**
 - Facilities that receive subpoenas, especially subpoenas requesting a client's personal information like their names, addresses, phone numbers, Social Security numbers, should immediately consult counsel—before responding or releasing any information—to determine if the subpoena must be complied with, can be blocked, or can be blocked in part. However, the facility must respond to subpoenas in a timely manner. Failure to do so may result in a contempt of court finding.

Additional Important Documents & Definitions

*What is a subpoena?

A Subpoena is a written request for information that gives the recipient a certain amount of time to respond.

- Immediately after a staff member receives a subpoena, staff should maintain the subpoena and make a copy of it, note the date the subpoena was served, note how it was served and by whom, and report this information to the designated supervisor or administrator.

A **Notice to Appear** is a document that instructs an individual to appear before an immigration judge.

- This is the first step in starting removal proceedings against them. Notices to appear are not directed at public service organizations. This means that staff are under no obligation to deliver the notice to the person named in the document.
- Staff should not, for example, ask the person named in the Notice to step forward or come to the front desk.
- Once staff properly recognize the document as a notice to appear, the designated supervisor should inform the officer, on behalf of the facility, that they do not want to answer any questions and ask the officers to leave their contact information.

- ***The supervisor should say, for example, “Thank you, but we are not going to answer any questions, but please leave your contact information.”***

If the facility does not have counsel, they can reach out to the National Homelessness Law Center, (202) 638-2535 or info@homelesslaw.org or National Immigration Law Center, (213) 639-3900 or info@nilc.org, for a possible referral.

During Entry Attempts & Entry:

→ Designated and trained staff should meet agents at entrances or the lobby to verify they have a valid judicial warrant to enter and facilitate their access.

- Remain calm.
- Have resources on hand to help you identify the validity of a warrant. To spot the differences between a judicial warrant (valid) and an administrative warrant (invalid) see [Exhibit 1](#) (page 14). Look for a header from a federal or state court, order number, and signature from a judge or magistrate.
- Notify legal counsel.¹
- Make a copy of the warrant if possible.
- Watch the agents carefully and keep track of what they do. See if they are following what is written on the warrant. The warrant may limit the areas the agents can search, and staff should provide access only to the areas specified in the warrant.

→ Staff may advise clients that they have the right to remain silent, decline to answer questions, and call an attorney, but clients do need to provide any immigration papers that they have in their possession when asked.

- Staff should remain mindful not to interfere with the enforcement agents' movements.

→ Remind staff they do not have to answer questions posed by the agents. Instead, they should direct them to speak to the designated administrator or supervisor on-site.

→ Supervisors and staff have the right to remain silent and should not answer questions about whether a particular person (client or staff) is currently in the facility. Say, “I am not authorized to provide you with information regarding our clients.” **Staff should advise agents which areas of the facility are private and will require a valid judicial warrant to access.**

- Staff may notify federal agents that they do not consent to any searches that are not required by law.

→ If federal agents try to enter a private area, staff should say: “This is a private area. You cannot enter without a judicial warrant signed by a judge. Do you have a judicial warrant?”

- If agents tell you that they have a judicial warrant, ask for a copy and read it to ensure that it is indeed a valid warrant. Note, you can accept the warrant but still verbally decline to consent to any searches in case they exceed the scope of the warrant, but do NOT interfere or otherwise obstruct the operation. Declining your consent may be helpful later if it is found they exceeded the scope of the warrant.

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- **Staff and supervisors may videotape or record any interactions with the officers, but they must announce that they are doing so.**
 - If you feel safe doing so, record the activity with your phone or write down any relevant information about what you witness, including names or badge numbers of agents. Staff should remain at a reasonable distance from the officers and their actions to avoid interfering.
- **If any arrests are made, ask for the names of individuals arrested and where they are going to be held. If no names are provided, create a list of who is missing.**
- **Fill out Exhibit 4 Resource from the NHLC Guide “ICE/POLICE ENFORCEMENT ACTION REPORT” with as much detail as possible.**
 - The form is meant to be used by facility staff to document the actions taken by a law enforcement agency. Provide as much detail as possible without interfering with the enforcement agency’s movements. Keep this document in a safe location and share with legal counsel, if applicable.

QUESTIONS:

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