

How to Find a Loved One After a U.S. Immigration Arrest

It can be hard and scary to find someone you care about after they are arrested for immigration reasons. The government keeps people in many different jails and prisons, sometimes far from their family and lawyers. This guide will help you look for someone who was taken by immigration officers and may be facing deportation.

How Do I Know What Government Agency is Detaining My Loved One?

The government has different offices that deal with immigration. If someone you care about was arrested and you think they may be deported, it helps to know which government office might be holding or detaining them.

- ▶ **Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE**, is the part of the government that arrests and holds people if arrested inside the United States for immigration reasons. ICE uses many different places to hold people, including county jails, holding rooms in federal buildings, private prisons, and some detention centers run by the government. Some states are also opening their own jails to hold people for immigration reasons.
- ▶ **Customs and Border Protection, or CBP**, is the part of the government that stops and arrests people near the U.S. borders. People held by CBP after trying to cross the border are often moved to ICE custody after a few days but may spend time in CBP custody.
- ▶ **The Bureau of Prisons, or BOP**, is the part of the government that runs federal prisons for people who are charged with or found guilty of breaking federal criminal laws. If someone is charged with an immigration-related federal crime, like coming into or reentering the U.S. without permission, they are probably in a BOP prison. ICE has also started using some BOP prisons to hold people who have a deportation case or are waiting for deportation, even if they don't have criminal charges.
- ▶ **Military Bases**, the Trump administration has started using Guantanamo Bay military base in Cuba to hold immigrants and the administration has expanded onto new military bases for short-term detention.

Finding Someone Detained in the U.S.

Follow these steps to try to figure out where your loved one is being held.

1. [Start with the Online Detainee Locator](#)

Many people arrested by ICE can be found using [ICE's Online Detainee Locator System \(ODLS\)](#). It can take more than a day for someone's name to show up in the system. People

held by CBP should also show up there after 48 hours in custody. There are two ways to look for someone on the Locator. The first way is by searching their alien registration number, called an “A number,” and country of birth. The “A number” starts with the letter A and has 9 numbers. You can find it on papers from immigration, like court notices or receipts for applications or on a work permit. You can also search using the person’s name and country of birth or citizenship.

Warning: The locator only finds people if you put their name in exactly the same way it was entered by the government worker. You might need to try different versions of their name. If a government worker made a mistake when typing the name, or mixed up the first and last names, it can be harder to find the person. Also, ICE can be slow to enter people’s information. Your loved one may not immediately appear on the locator, even though they are in ICE detention. When ICE moves someone to a new jail, they may also temporarily not show up on the locator.

Exceptions:

- ▶ Children under 18 who are arrested inside the U.S. do not show up in the online locator system. If a child is arrested with their parent(s) in the U.S., they may be held together family detention center. Adults held in family detention centers should show up in the online locator system, but their children do not. It is not uncommon for ICE to detain a male parent/guardian in a separate facility from their family.
- ▶ If an immigrant minor is arrested by the police and then transferred to ICE, they may not appear in the locator. There is at least [one juvenile jail](#) where these minors may be sent.
- ▶ If the person who was arrested has an immigration case based on being a victim, like a T or U visa, they usually won’t show up in the locator system.

Tip: Take a screenshot or picture of any information you find when you search. This information might be helpful later, especially if the person gets moved to a different place. It’s also a good idea to keep a timeline of what happens after the person is arrested. This can help later in trying to get them released. Also, thanks to a new mobile phone application from Human Rights Watch, you can now have changes in ODLs automatically sent to you. The application can be [downloaded here](#) and it is called “Immigration Client Locator” and is for attorneys, family, and friends.

2. Next, Try to Contact the ICE Field Office

If you don’t get results from the locator system, try calling or emailing your local ICE Field Office. This office is also called the ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations, or “ERO,” office. The locator might tell you to do this and give you the phone number. You can also find the phone number and email for each office online, [here](#).

Warning: When you call or email, don't give more information than you need to. Only give the necessary A number or basic information, like name and country of birth, that you would use in the online locator.

Tip #1: ICE Field Offices may not answer the phone. You might need to call many times each day. If you get someone on the phone or by email, ask for the name and contact information for the officer in charge of your loved one's case. This will be very important if you want to help them try to get out of detention.

3. Next, Try Checking the Bureau of Prisons or Vinelink

In 2025, ICE began using prisons run by the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to hold people for immigration cases. People held there *should* show up on the ICE locator system. But if they don't show up, and the arrest happened near a BOP facility, try calling that prison for information. You can find a list of phone numbers online [here](#).

More and more, the government is charging immigrants with federal [crimes related to migration](#). In these cases, the person might be in a BOP prison and should have a federal public defender (free lawyer). You can search for them using the BOP's online inmate locator system [here](#).

Also, sometimes someone is first held in state criminal custody before they are sent to ICE. To try and keep track of them, you can look them up on a website that shows if someone is in state criminal custody [called Vinelink](#).

4. Look For Them Using the Jail's Phone and Scheduling Systems

[Most jails let you put money in your loved one's jail accounts to pay for phone calls and extra food items. For example, some jails use a company called "Access Corrections." Their website may show your loved one's location \(even if you do not set up an account with them\). Some attorneys are also able to confirm someone's location through a website offered by ICE to set up legal phone calls.](#)

5. Next, Reach out to the Consulates

All immigrants in ICE jails [have the right to](#) contact their country's consulate (an office representing another country). You can try contacting the consulate for more information about your loved one.

Warning: If your loved one is asking for asylum in the U.S. or you believe they are afraid of their government, do not try calling the consulate.

6. If You Still Haven't Found Them, Start Crossing Off Places They Aren't At

If you can't find someone using the online locator systems, you might have to start calling each ICE field office and local jails. ICE shares a list (although it's not always complete) of all the places they are using to hold people. This list is in an excel spreadsheet is posted at the bottom of this web [page](#), under the section called "Detention Statistics." You can see the list of facilities in the tab that says "Facilities FY25," and then narrow your search by looking at all the jails in your state or nearby states. Also, [a group](#) called Freedom for Immigrants has a helpful list of ICE detention centers with information on how to contact people being held there, online [here](#). They also include groups that sometimes visit the facility.

Tip #1: Each ICE Field Office is in charge of certain areas of the country. If someone is arrested in a state that doesn't have an ICE detention facility, look to find which Field Office covers that state. ICE is likely to be holding the person in one of the other states that Field Office covers. For example, the Atlanta Field Office covers Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

Tip #2: ICE only uses certain jails to detain women. [If you](#)'re looking for a female loved one, you can use [ICE's excel sheet](#) to cross of jails that don't hold women.

What If You Are Worried the Government Sent Your Loved One Overseas?

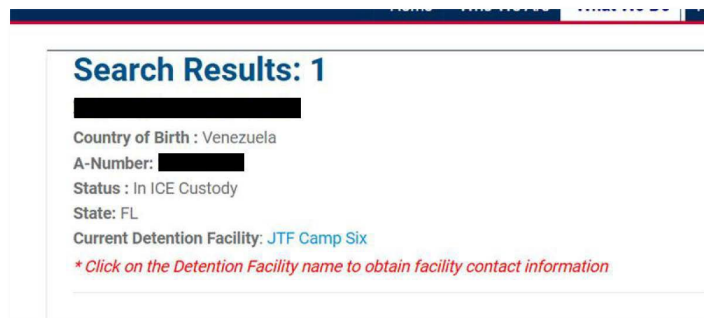
Under President Trump, ICE has arrested people and disappeared them to military bases and jail in other countries, like Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and a prison called the "Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo," or [CECOT](#), in El Salvador.

Guantanamo Bay Military Base

Sometimes, a person sent to Guantanamo Bay will still show up in the Online Detainee Locator. Here are two examples of what their results in the Locator might look like:



Detention Information For:
[redacted]
Country of Birth: Venezuela
A-Number: [redacted]
Current Detention Facility:
JTF Camp Six
In Care of ERO Miami Field Office
865 SW 78th Ave, Suite 101
Plantation, FL 33324
Visitor Information: (954) 236-4900



Search Results: 1
[redacted]
Country of Birth : Venezuela
A-Number: [redacted]
Status : In ICE Custody
State: FL
Current Detention Facility: [JTF Camp Six](#)
** Click on the Detention Facility name to obtain facility contact information*

ICE has a [webpage](#) for the two places at the naval base where people are held, called “JTF Camp 6” and the Migrant Operations Center. The page says to call the Miami Field Office for more information.

Deportation to Other Countries (Third Countries)

The U.S. government has sent immigrants to countries that are not their home countries or places where they have lived before. For example, the U.S. sent Venezuelan immigrants to a Salvadoran prison. The U.S. has also sent immigrants to countries like Eswatini and Ghana, even though they are not from those countries. If your loved has been sent to a third country, they will no longer show up on the U.S. locator systems. Human Rights First is [tracking ICE flights](#) to other countries and their reports may help you track down your loved one. If your loved one has completely disappeared after an arrest by U.S. officials, you can report their disappearance to the [United Nations by filing a report here](#).

What to do when you find your loved one:

- ▶ If you think they are being held at Guantanamo Bay, call the ABA Hotline to let them know your loved one is there. This may help the ABA provide them with some limited legal assistance. *Please* only call the hotline if you have confirmed Guantanamo Bay is where your loved one has been taken. The hotline is **not** for people searching for their loved ones. The number is 1-855-641-6081.
- ▶ The government will not give your loved one a free lawyer for their immigration case. You might be able to help your loved one find an immigration lawyer using these links:
 - The American Immigration Lawyers Association’s online directory of private attorneys is here: ailalawyer.com/.
 - The American Bar Association has a list of lawyers’ groups across the country. You can search in each state group for lawyers who handle immigration cases: https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_services/flh-home/flh-bar-directories-and-lawyer-finders/.
 - The Immigration Advocates Network and Pro Bono Net directory lists free and low-cost lawyers: immi.org/en/Info/FindLegalHelp.
- ▶ If your loved one is in ICE custody, they might be able to ask to be freed “on recognizance” (their own free will) or on “bond” or “parole.” You might be able to help them to try to get released by getting proof of their connection to the community like school, work, or volunteer records, or writing letters of support or getting letters of support from other community members.
- ▶ Make sure your loved one knows their rights. If your loved one is afraid to return to their home country, they should say that loudly and clearly to every immigration agent they see. If they have lived in the U.S. for at least 2 years, they should tell an officer and show them proof. If they have applied for status or are appealing an immigration decision,

they should tell an officer and show proof of their application or appeal. They should not sign any documents without talking to a lawyer first or asking that it be read in their own language, especially any documents that say “waiver,” “stipulated removal order,” or “voluntary departure agreement.”

- ▶ Learn more here: [Know Your Rights: What to Do if You Are Arrested by or Detained by Immigration](#).

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