

Three steps to take now to fight back against Trump's planned mass deportations

Pennsylvania Immigration Coalition director Jasmine Rivera outlines what the Biden administration — and individuals — can do to prevent or slow proposed mass deportations of immigrants under Trump.

by Jasmine Rivera, For The Inquirer
Published Nov. 14, 2024, 7:00 a.m. ET

As the Pennsylvania Coalition, we have fielded many questions on Immigration about the Trump administration's plans for mass raids and deportations. Many people are looking for answers on how to remain safe, prepare, and support the immigrant community. Just as frequently, we are getting asked what can be done to fight back. And fight back we will.

Because here in Pennsylvania, the immigrant rights movement has a plan. For the coalition working in 27 counties across the state, 60 organizations we always knew we would have a fight ahead of us. Since election night, the Trump administration has confirmed it plans to implement the authoritarian immigration goals laid out in , which Project 2025 include denaturalizing immigrant citizens, ending birthright citizenship, expanding immigrant detention, and deputizing local law enforcement and the military in order to execute mass raids and deportations. If they have their way, people in our communities will be rounded up like animals and shipped away, families once again torn apart.

These plans come with a high price tag, with an estimated cost of \$88 billion a year. The breaks down the costs: "For the same American Immigration Council costs as pursuing a strategy of mass deportations of one million people a year, sustained over 10-plus years until 13.3 million people have either been deported or left on their own, the United States could build over 40,450 new elementary schools in communities around the nation."

Further, the council states that we could construct over 2.9 million new homes, fund the Head Start program for nearly 79 years, pay full tuition and expenses for over 4.3 million people to attend a private college for four years (or over 8.9 million people to attend an in-state public college for four years), or buy a brand-new car for over 20.4 million people.

Mass deportations are not only a waste of money; the economic consequences of losing that many people, people who are vital to various sectors of our communities, will impact everyone.

So what can be done? Quite a lot, because when our communities come together, we are powerful. Here are the top three actions I am calling on all residents of the state to join us in demanding.

1. The Biden administration must dismantle the deportation machine

As a nation, we have already witnessed the atrocities the first Trump administration committed when it inherited the deportation machine from the Obama administration. It is imperative that the Biden administration dismantle the deportation machine before Trump takes office again. We know the Trump administration will rebuild the deportation machine — but rebuilding takes time, and that's time we need to keep people protected.

There are 20 concrete actions the President can take; I'll highlight three. Joe Biden The White House can end ICE contracts that keep immigrant detention centers open. The people released from detention will still have to continue their immigration cases, but they will be able to do so with the support of their communities and loved ones.

Since Immigration and Customs Enforcement did not follow the federal enforcement priorities set by the Biden administration, and since many people are currently in deportation proceedings because of that failure to follow those enforcement priorities, the Biden administration can have the U.S. Department of Homeland Security use prosecutorial discretion to cancel pending deportation cases.

Additionally, the Biden administration can lift the June presidential executive order on border closures that allowed for prosecution of folks who, seeking asylum, enter without appointments. This violation of asylum rights is a Trump-era policy — and lifting it now would allow people who qualify for asylum to have it granted.

2. Local governments should end collaboration with ICE and pass welcoming policies

Given the Trump administration's plans to deputize local law enforcement through 287(g) and utilize the military for mass raids and deportations, it is critical that our local elected leaders refuse cooperation. That means passing or protecting policies that prohibit local law enforcement, prisons, probation, and courts from sharing data, communicating, and collaborating with ICE agents. It further means passing welcoming policies on the municipal and county levels, like ensuring language access protocols and welcoming schools policies. Effective implementation is where the rubber meets the road — when such policies are passed, staff must be properly trained and supported, and if policies are violated, there must be action taken with staff so it does not happen again. In Philadelphia, we have a welcoming schools policy on the books, but training of district employees has been minimal. Just this past year, a principal threatened to call ICE on a student. It also means passing welcoming policies on the state level, not just with legislation — there are eight bills that have already been introduced into the legislature — but also in the administration. Gov. stood up to Josh Shapiro.

Trump as attorney general, and we are going to need him now to do it again as governor. He can begin by echoing the demand that the White House dismantle as much of the deportation machine as possible before Inauguration Day. Shapiro can also make sure that state prisons and probation stop data sharing, communicating, and collaborating with ICE, and he can strengthen the current ICE policy with state police.

3. Get involved with your local immigrant rights organizations

If you live in Pennsylvania, you can see which Pennsylvania Immigration Coalition members are doing work near you . These organizations by county have been doing the work for years, and many of the leaders in these organizations are immigrants themselves. Getting involved looks different for each person, so whether you can volunteer, become a member of an organization, take action, donate, or raise funds, find out how you can best support those near you.

Like so many in the immigrant community and the broader immigrant rights movement, we are going through a range of emotions. But I assure you, we will organize, educate, and mobilize. We will hold the urgent needs right alongside the long-term organizing needed for structural change. We will provide care as well as political education, services alongside leadership development, and do this work locally and nationally because there is no other choice.

Join us.

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