

ACLU of Wisconsin: Urges Wisconsin sheriffs to protect public health and stop cooperating with ICE amid pandemic

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The ACLU of Wisconsin this week urged county sheriffs to help stop the spread of COVID-19 by declining to cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement amid the COVID-19 pandemic, calling on them in a letter not to honor voluntary federal detainer requests made by ICE.

A key cog in the United States' mass deportation machine, detainers ask local law enforcement officials to continue holding immigrants for an additional 48 hours after they are entitled to be released so a determination on whether or not to hold them in an ICE detention center can be made.

The letter — sent to the 12 sheriff departments in the state that receive the most detainer requests — underscored the urgent need to rapidly reduce jail populations in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, a task which cannot be accomplished while still incarcerating people at the behest of ICE. The organization also reminded sheriffs that they are under no legal obligation to honor detainers because the requests are entirely voluntary.

“This is no time to use scarce local resources doing favors for ICE,” said Chris Ott, executive director of the ACLU of Wisconsin. “The ACLU has long opposed cooperation with ICE in the absence of a judicial warrant, and this is particularly important now. We are in the throes of a global pandemic, and the ACLU of Wisconsin is calling on sheriffs in our state to recognize that partnering with ICE will only make a bad situation worse,” Ott continued. “We have already seen the

devastation that ensues once COVID-19 reaches correctional facilities. We ask sheriffs to stay focused on saving lives, not catering to the federal government's extreme, mass deportation agenda."

"Sheriffs by no means have to fulfill detainer requests, and it is well within their rights not to adhere to them. Many localities across the state already refuse to comply with ICE and are still fully capable of enforcing the law," said Tim Muth, a staff attorney with the ACLU of Wisconsin. "Sheriffs simply cannot afford to run the risk of further crowding their facilities at a time when jails and prisons throughout the country are reeling from COVID-19 outbreaks."

Deportations themselves have come under scrutiny for playing a role in spreading the virus. A Guatemalan man who was [deported](#) from the US just last week has reportedly tested positive for COVID-19.

This release and a copy of the letter (which is also attached to this email) is available online at: <https://www.aclu-wi.org/en/news/aclu-wisconsin-urges--wisconsin-sheriffs-protect-public-health-and-stop-cooperating-ice-amid>