

## R.I. schools take steps to ease fears in face of deportation threats

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"Know Your Rights" sessions are being held around Rhode Island, home to an estimated 30,000 or more undocumented immigrants. "No way is a kid coming out of this building," says Angelo Garcia, who runs the Segue Institute for Learning in Central Falls.

By Karen Lee Ziner

Journal Staff Writer

By Linda Borg

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Amid threats of increased deportations nationwide under the Trump administration, schools in Rhode Island's urban cores are working to soothe distraught immigrant children and parents.

They are sending information home to parents spelling out their legal rights if they are undocumented; training staff on what to do should federal immigration agents show up, and asking social workers to recognize students' fears and concerns.

A growing interfaith sanctuary movement has drawn Providence Mayor Jorge Elorza to its side. Providence Public Safety Commissioner Steven Pare has advised the group from a law-enforcement perspective at the steering committee's invitation. He says: "I'll continue to participate if it's helpful."

One church sanctuary space is ready, and safety and screening protocols are being established, says the Rev. Donald C. Anderson, executive minister of the Rhode Island State Council of Churches, who has been co-leading the efforts.

Meanwhile, "Know Your Rights" sessions are being held around Rhode Island, home to an estimated 30,000 or more undocumented immigrants. They cover everything from anti-Muslim discrimination to police practices, demonstrations and "What to Do if ICE is at Your Door." ("Know Your Rights. Remain Calm.")

All are reacting to Trump's announced policies that require Homeland Security to move more aggressively to find, arrest and deport undocumented immigrants, regardless of whether they have committed serious crimes.

It authorizes hiring thousands more immigration and border patrol agents and seeks to deputize local law enforcement as immigration agents.

A Q&A furnished by an ICE spokesman says the agency will still honor its "sensitive locations" policy that directs agents to steer clear of schools, hospitals and houses of worship. But not everyone trusts that.

Just Wednesday, ICE removed an undocumented immigrant with a diagnosed brain tumor from a Texas hospital, and returned her bound hand and foot to a detention center, according to The Los Angeles Times and other media outlets.

ICE contests those reports, saying she had not been "forcibly removed," "shackled" or scheduled for brain surgery. She'd been transferred from the hospital back to the detention center after a physician determined her condition was "stable," pending an appointment next week with a specialist.

"I don't blame people in the community for being fearful and not trusting of ICE," said Steven Brown, executive director of the Rhode Island American Civil Liberties Union. "Notwithstanding the 'sensitive locations' policy, I don't find it all unreasonable to fear rogue officers engaging in activities they shouldn't."

"Families are very afraid," said Deborah Gonzalez, director of the Roger Williams University School of Law Immigration Clinic. "What will happen if I get arrested? Do my kids have to go with me if they are citizens? Those are hard questions. We're talking about children who may not be able to concentrate because Mom and Dad may not get home."

Sarah Friedman, co-director of the Learning Community charter school in Central Falls, says, "We have a safe school policy that gives us the ability to involve a lawyer if ICE comes to school. We've also mapped protocols and trained staff in different possible scenarios. We have scripted what roles everyone plays."

Friedman said some families are keeping their children home because they are afraid to be apart. Other families have told educators that their children are afraid to sleep alone.

Angelo Garcia, who runs the Segue Institute for Learning charter school in Central Falls, says, "I told my board two weeks ago, 'This where we stand.' If someone comes to our school ... be ready to bail me out of jail. No way is a kid coming out of this building."

Segue is already feeling the impact of the Trump administration's threats to crack down on undocumented immigrants. Garcia said: "We can't validate their fear. We have to make sure that we are giving our kids a secure environment and even cry with them. We tell them, 'You are not dealing with this on your own.'"

Jeremy Chiappetta, executive director of Blackstone Valley Prep, said BVP students were joking immediately after the election about whether they would be deported. Now, the tone has changed.

"People aren't joking anymore," Chiappetta said. "The conversation is muted now. It's happening in the corners, behind closed doors, at the bus stop ..."

**The RI ACLU** has participated in Know Your Rights sessions, and distributed its pamphlets widely, including on its website, [www.riaclu.org](http://www.riaclu.org).

"There is an understandably strong demand for this type of information," says Brown, the executive director. The sessions started after Trump tried to impose a travel ban targeting seven Muslim-majority countries, "and have increased significantly since then." [A federal court blocked the ban; Trump is expected to announce a revised ban next week.]

RWU has partnered with several schools, including the Learning Community, Central Falls and Providence to present the forums. After the sessions, pro bono attorneys have privately counseled individual attendees.

"Not only do we give them their rights, we give them a safety plan," Gonzalez said. " ... They should put all of their documents in one place. They should make sure that someone has access to money so someone can pay their bond," for example. And undocumented families should assign someone the power of attorney in case parents are separated from their children.

Gonzalez and Carl Krueger, immigration lawyer for Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island, will be among those conducting a Know Your Rights session Monday from 7 to 10 p.m. at Providence Public Library.

**Mr. Anderson**, the Rhode Island State Council of Churches executive minister, says a core group is crafting the local sanctuaries plan, part of a national movement. He and others involved have said they are willing to physically block ICE agents, in acts of civil disobedience that could result in arrest.

Referrals will start with the faith community, he said. "We are reaching out to the immigrant community with individuals and organizations we trust. If you'll vouch for them, we'll move forward with matching them up with a congregation that can take sanctuary."

Anderson said, "What we're concerned about, is a person who would create a situation that would make it unsafe for people caring for them." Likewise, they want to prevent an unstable person from coming in and "wanting to do harm" to someone in sanctuary.

Elorza said, "I am very much on board [with the sanctuary efforts], and as I said, we're an inclusive city, we're a sanctuary city. We are going to continue to do everything we can to make sure people feel safe and stay safe in Providence."

Meanwhile, state Rep. Arthur J. Corvese, D-North Providence, has introduced a bill to outlaw sanctuary cities in Rhode Island. Corvese said he introduced the same legislation last year and "this is not in response to Trump." He cited violent crimes by two undocumented immigrants in Ohio and California: the men had been previously picked up by authorities but released — despite their known immigration status.

"The impetus here is not to tear families apart, but try to codify into law a method by which the bad actors in the immigrant community can be ferreted out and deported," Corvese said.

Public Safety Commissioner Pare has discussed law-enforcement protocols with the sanctuary planners,

including that police typically do not enter houses of worship, schools, or hospitals to apprehend a suspect. He said there are exceptions, for example: If a murder suspect was in a cathedral, "we'd go in and get him."

Pare said, "The Providence police are not and should not be enforcing immigration laws. The position I've maintained since I've been here ... is that we as a city continue to object to the federal government mandating that we are an arm of ICE in any way. I think it's counterproductive to what we do, and to the bond and trust we've built in the community."