

Sensitive Locations/Protected Areas and Immigration Enforcement April 2025

What are protected areas?

Protected areas are places where, in the past, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), under [policy guidance](#), would not take enforcement actions except in limited circumstances. Locations referred to as a “protected areas” included places where people access to essential services such as: schools, medical or mental healthcare facilities, places of worship or religious study, places where children gather (i.e. playgrounds, recreation centers, school bus stop), and social services establishments (i.e. domestic violence shelters, food bank).

Is there currently a policy reflecting this guidance?

No. The Trump Administration [rescinded](#) the 2021 Guidelines for Enforcement Actions in or Near Protected Areas on January 20, 2025. In January 2025, the Trump Administration issued three new policy documents on [protected areas and courthouse arrests](#): DHS Directive *Enforcement Actions in or Near Protected Areas*, ICE [Interim Guidance: Civil Immigration Enforcement Actions in or Near Courthouses](#), and ICE Directive [Common Sense Enforcement Actions in or Near Protected Areas](#).

According to [DHS](#), “DHS is not issuing rules regarding where immigration laws are permitted to be enforced. Instead through the Jan. 31, 2025, ICE memorandum, the ICE Director charges Assistant Field Office Directors and Assistant Special Agents in Charge with the responsibility for making case-by-case determinations regarding whether, where and when to conduct an immigration enforcement action in or near a protected area.” The [Interim Guidance: Civil Immigration Enforcement Actions in or Near Courthouses](#) states that ICE agents and officers should generally avoid enforcement actions at or near courthouses that are wholly dedicated to non-criminal proceedings (i.e. family courts, small claims courts).

Before its rescission in 2025, the [2021 policy directive](#) entitled *Guidelines for Enforcement Actions in or Near Protected Areas*, covering both ICE and CBP, was the active guidance on immigration enforcement actions in or near areas that require special protection. The policy stated, “we can accomplish our enforcement mission without denying or limiting individuals’ access to needed medical care, children access to their schools, the displaced access to food and shelter, people of faith access to their places of worship, and more.”

What will the impact be on immigrant communities now that the guidance is rescinded?

Rescinding the 2021 memo removes from DHS policy the foundational principle that to the fullest extent possible, DHS should not take enforcement action in or near a protected area. Under the first Trump Administration, despite the existence of the protected areas guidance, there were highly publicized incidents of enforcement against immigrants [dropping their children off at school](#), [en route to the hospital](#), [inside a courthouse](#), and outside [church-affiliated homeless](#)

[shelters](#). As in the past, it is possible that immigrant families could choose not to access education, healthcare, or other available services and activities out of fear.

What is being done as President Trump ended the protected areas memo?

In 2025, during the 119th Congress, Representative Espaillat and Senator Blumenthal re-introduced the [Protecting Sensitive Locations Act](#). This bill prohibits immigration enforcement actions within 1,000 feet of a sensitive location unless there are exigent circumstances, in which case prior approval must be obtained from certain officials. The sensitive locations in this bill mirror those in the 2021 Protected Areas Memo and if Congress were to introduce and pass it, sensitive locations protections would be codified into law.

Has there been litigation on the rescission of protected areas policies?

Yes. In January 2025, Quaker, Baptist and Sikh congregations [filed a lawsuit](#), asking the court to declare unconstitutional any policy permitting government agents to carry out immigration enforcement activities at or near houses of worship. In February 2025, a federal judge issued a [preliminary injunction](#) in the case *Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends v. U.S. Department of Homeland Security*, which prohibits DHS from enforcing the Jan 20 memo on *Enforcement Actions in or Near Protected Areas* and the Jan 31 memo on *Common Sense Enforcement Actions in or Near Protected Areas* on enforcement actions in or near any of the Plaintiffs' places of worship. Instead, the order directs that DHS must apply the [2021 policy directive](#) to Plaintiffs' places of worship. The [preliminary injunction](#) does not enjoin or restrict DHS from conducting arrests in or near places of worship when authorized by an administrative or judicial warrant.

What can I do?

- **Write to your Representative or Senator urging them to introduce and support the "Protecting Sensitive Locations Act"**
Write a letter urging your Senators and Representative to co-sponsor and support the "Protecting Sensitive Locations Act". [Click here to find out who represents you in Congress](#), and reach out to our Policy and Advocacy team at advocacy@globalrefuge.org for support drafting your letter.
- **Advocate with the Global Refuge Advocacy and Policy team**
[Sign up](#) to receive the monthly newsletter, invitations to informative webinars, and learn how to engage lawmakers on migration policy issues.
- **Pray for immigrants and refugees.**
Utilize Global Refuge's [prayer resources](#) and lift your voice in prayer for immigrants and refugees.