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Public Defender Condemns First ICE Arrest Inside Alameda County Courthouse and Demands More Protections for Clients

OAKLAND -- Public Defender Brendon Woods condemns the first arrest by ICE agents inside an Alameda County courthouse and calls for greater protections for clients attending court.

“ICE raids at our courthouses must stop immediately,” said Woods. “People who follow a judge’s orders to attend court should not have to fear federal agents kidnapping them and dragging them away to detention centers. Our democracy cannot function if this continues.”

On September 15, a public defender client appeared with his lawyer for a routine pretrial hearing at Wiley Manuel Courthouse in Oakland. After the judge called his case and gave him a new court date, the client exited the courtroom. His public defender remained inside the courtroom. Two agents in plain clothes, who said they were from ICE, accosted him in a courthouse hallway and then took him out of the building, where an unmarked vehicle was waiting. ICE eventually took him to a detention facility, where he remains.

The ICE detention does not appear related to his criminal case. The public defender will not discuss any details of his pending criminal case, his immigration status or the possible reason for his immigration arrest. The client does not appear to have any criminal convictions.

“Everyone—our clients, victims, witnesses, staff, lawyers—deserves to participate without fear. Our justice system loses legitimacy when people do not feel safe entering a courthouse,” Woods said. “We cannot allow a racist, authoritarian regime to interfere with our local courts like this. It’s time to pick a side. Either you allow this to happen to members of our community or you take action to prevent it.”

Woods is calling on local justice stakeholders, including the sheriff, district attorney and presiding judge, to work with his office to protect the courts as places of safety and due process. Ideas include:

- 1) Post signage at courthouse entry points requiring ICE agents and all law enforcement personnel to identify themselves upon entry, whether in uniform or plainclothes.
- 2) All agencies commit to not cooperate with ICE enforcement actions by prohibiting employees from affirmatively contacting ICE, sharing information about individuals’

court or probation appointments, case status or immigration status with ICE.

- 3) All agencies commit to promptly notify each other upon learning of any planned or active ICE enforcement action occurring at or near the courthouse or jail.

“No one should be punished for obeying a court’s request for a personal appearance,” said Deputy Public Defender Raha Jorjani, who supervises the public defender’s immigration unit. “By appearing before the criminal court, our client was obeying the rules. This is about more than one arrest. It’s about whether we are building a system rooted in justice—or one rooted in fear.”

In 2014, the Alameda County Public Defender’s Office [created the first immigration unit](#) at a public defender office outside New York. Earlier this year, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors allocated additional funds to the public defender’s immigration unit as part of its effort to support communities impacted by recent federal policies.

Woods recently coauthored [an op-ed](#) criticizing ICE arrests at courthouses.

[The ACLU and other groups recently filed a lawsuit](#) against President Trump’s administration to try to stop courthouse arrests and improve immigrant detention conditions. In 2017 during President Trump’s first presidency, California Chief Justice Cantil-Sakauye [wrote a letter](#) to his administration complaining of immigration arrests at superior courts. In 2019, the California Legislature codified [AB 668 as Civil Code 43.54](#), which was specifically designed to prohibit civil arrests—including by ICE—at state courthouses.

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