

February 26, 2026

Members of Congress,

We, the undersigned organizations, represent thousands of students, educators, and advocates across the country. Over the past year, we have watched as our kids' freedom to learn in a welcoming and safe environment and ability to get to school and back home safely have been severely impacted by the Department of Homeland Security's ICE enforcement activities in communities—especially around schools. We've seen:

- In St. Paul, MN, a special education van was stopped by federal agents on the way to school. Assistant Superintendent for St. Paul Public Schools shared that students are losing access to the services they need to learn and grow. She notes: "Over 1,000 students with disabilities requested virtual services because they felt so unsafe leaving their home to come to school . . . They are faced with an impossible choice: seek the services their child needs to grow and make progress, or stay in their homes to avoid the risk of separation."
- In Portland, ME, Michelin Ntumba, a mother of four with no criminal record and a pending asylum application, was followed home by ICE agents after dropping one of her children off at school for the day, and taken into custody. Almost a month later, she remains in detention. Because Ntumba is the sole caregiver for her children, her oldest child - not yet 21- is now caring, with community support, for her younger siblings.
- In Encinitas, CA, armed federal agents removed a child's father during school dropoff in an area designated a safe route for kids, causing students to experience "fear and trauma," according to the Superintendent.
- In New Haven, CT, two children - both US citizens - being driven to school watched as armed agents in ski masks took their mother away. She has since been deported and the students ask every school employee in uniform where their mother is. According to local educators, rumors and fears disrupt learning.

- In Chicago, IL, armed agents "violently dragged" a teacher from a preschool, going room to room in front of parents, young children, and other teachers—in some cases demanding to see other adults' papers—in what a local elected representative says will take "a long time" for the feeling of fear to go away.

It doesn't have to be this way.

For more than 30 years, both Democratic and Republican Presidents upheld policy to protect schools from immigration enforcement because they recognize

the importance of keeping them as safe spaces for children to learn. Those rules persisted during the first Trump Administration. And there is no reason to eliminate them now, as the rules have always allowed immigration officers to do their jobs without putting students and teachers at risk.

Research from California's Central Valley, North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenberg, and an urban district in Florida show that various groups of students, not just undocumented students or students whose parents are undocumented, suffer terribly as a result of ICE raids. One study showed students in districts most proximate to raids missed an estimated *22% more* days of school than they had the previous year - and rates of absenteeism were even higher for younger students.

Schools must be safe, welcoming places where students, educators, and families can learn and thrive without fear of immigration enforcement or law-enforcement actions that undermine educational environments. Eliminating schools' designation as sensitive locations, free of immigration enforcement, makes that impossible.

Congress has both the authority and the responsibility to prevent this harm. We urge you to make sure the final DHS funding agreement includes clear, enforceable protections for sensitive locations that keep immigration enforcement out of schools so that every child can attend school safely and regularly.

SIGNED BY:

AASA, The School Superintendents Association

Advocates for Children of New York

All4Ed

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE)

American Association of University Women (AAUW)

American Atheists

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

Arab American Institute (AAI)

California Partnership for the Future of Learning
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Youth & Community Leadership in Education (CYCLE)
Coalition on Human Needs
EDGE Partners
EdTrust
Education Law Center
Education Law Center - PA
Educators for Excellence
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)
Equal Justice Society
Families in Schools
Honesty for Ohio Education
Kids First Chicago
League of Education Voters
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement (NAFSCE)
National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC)
National Education Association (NEA)
National Newcomer Network
National Parents Union (NPU)
Parents for Public Schools
Public Advocates Inc
Public School Forum of North Carolina
Red, Wine & Blue
Students Engaged in Advancing Texas (SEAT)
The Advocacy Institute
The Center for Learner Equity
The Chicago Public Education Fund
UnidosUS
Youth Advocacy & Policy Lab (Y-Lab)