

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 30, 2026

The Honorable Todd Blanche
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Sirce E. Owen
Acting Director
Executive Office for Immigration Review
5107 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, VA 22041

David Venturella
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th St NW
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Attorney General Blanche, Acting Director Owen, and Acting Director Venturella,

We write regarding our serious concerns about the Trump administration's efforts to politicize the immigration court system, undermine due process, and expedite deportations of Oregon's immigrant communities to meet arbitrary deportation quotas in fulfillment of Donald Trump and Stephen Miller's broader anti-immigrant crusade. These unilateral policy changes and tactics separate hardworking immigrant families in Oregon, harm at-risk children and adults seeking asylum and other forms of humanitarian relief, and create unnecessary challenges for immigration attorneys. This unwarranted blitzkrieg of assaults on justice and fair treatment raises serious constitutional concerns and is unworthy of the oaths you swore to uphold.

Over the past year, your agencies have increased the number of immigrants who must appear on little-to-no notice for so-called "mega master" hearings on overcrowded dockets in front of Trump's handpicked judges at courts across the country, all while stripping immigrants of their legal status, ramping up arrests and detention, and limiting their access to legal counsel for representation in court and fast-tracked asylum interviews. These policy changes confuse and terrify law-abiding immigrants in our communities and prevent them from having a fair day in court.

The Portland Immigration Court in our state of Oregon is now holding about two "mega master" hearings every week, in addition to maintaining its previously-scheduled docket hearings and individual merit hearings. This has forced immigrants who were anticipating court dates in 2027 or 2028 to suddenly show up on extremely short notice. Immigrants are scrambling to figure out how to get to the court on time, while simultaneously trying to find an attorney to represent them. If some of these people manage to find attorneys, those attorneys are then stuck racing against the clock to file paperwork on their behalf and making travel arrangements to attend court to advocate for their clients. Attorneys have shared with our offices their concerns that they cannot review complex cases and provide effective assistance and counsel on such short notice. Oftentimes, immigrants are forced to go to court without any counsel, leaving them alone to navigate a complex and adversarial immigration system by themselves. This includes unaccompanied immigrant children who have often already been subjected to trauma, abuse, and exploitation, and simply are too young to advocate for themselves without counsel. These cases are particularly troubling as Congress has enacted laws and appropriated funding to ensure that unaccompanied children have access to legal counsel to the greatest extent practicable, but the scheduling tactics we are seeing in immigration court has rendered kids without counsel.

Many immigrants in Oregon have never been in a courtroom before, do not speak English fluently, and do not know how immigration proceedings function. Yet, they are still expected to inform the court of the forms of relief they seek, articulate clearly why they are entitled to such relief, and navigate pleadings that may permanently shape their case. With hundreds of cases on the docket for the day, judges must move quickly from case to case, rendering decisions within a matter of minutes. In fact, attorneys have shared that judges start court proceedings by doing a roll call of the list of names on the docket, anticipating that many of these individuals will not appear, and then ordering removal in absentia, without verifying if proper notice was actually served. All of this raises serious concerns about basic fairness at the Portland Immigration Court.

As if the changes at the Portland Immigration Court weren't bad enough, the neighboring Tacoma Immigration Court has now had judges deciding in mid-August to stop allowing immigration attorneys across Oregon, Idaho, and Alaska from appearing remotely on behalf of their clients detained at the regional detention center. As Oregon, Idaho, and Alaska do not have immigration detention centers, most immigrants detained by federal authorities in these states are taken to the regional detention center in Tacoma, Washington. Previously, the Tacoma Immigration Court allowed out-of-state attorneys to represent their clients by making court appearances through video conferencing technology. Now attorneys—and when applicable, expert witnesses—have to attend these hearings in person. At the same time, however, judges are allowing the prosecution from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to participate in these hearings remotely. What is worse is when the attorneys, clients, and expert witnesses all make arrangements to come to court, they find out that the judge will be joining the hearing remotely from another state. Some attorneys have shared that remote appearances by judges happen in about half the cases that they must attend in-person at the Tacoma Immigration Court. These double-standards make no sense, and only add additional unjust and needless barriers for immigrants who deserve to have a fair immigration hearing.

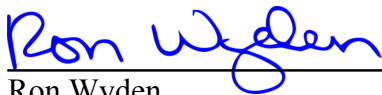
For many attorneys, the logistics associated with showing up to court across state lines is a hardship they cannot sustain. When U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) takes custody of individuals and wants to begin removal proceedings, DHS will issue a “notice to appear” for them and then file the documents with the appropriate court with the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR). The court then must accept the “notice to appear” and set a hearing date. But in some cases, attorneys are finding the Tacoma Immigration Court is setting the hearing date for later in the morning of that same day. A mere few hours' notice is insufficient for attorneys to prepare and represent their clients, and we've been told that many attorneys feel compelled to decline taking up such cases. Attorneys have also detailed that certain judges at the Tacoma Immigration Court are using a particular client's hearing to discuss with the attorney other immigrant clients they represent, which is inappropriate.

Even in cases where attorneys have more time to prepare, they encounter issues with ICE failing to facilitate their access to immigrants detained at ICE's Northwest Detention Center, undermining these immigrants' Fifth and Sixth Amendment rights to due process and counsel. ICE has also been routinely transferring clients from the Northwest Detention Center thousands of miles away to Texas, Louisiana, and other distant states, without any notice of the transfer to the attorney or clarification on where the hearing will occur. Then, these attorneys face a double standard and are told to appear in person, even though they have no idea where exactly their clients are detained, and when such a requirement is waived for judges and DHS attorneys, who are permitted to appear remotely. Requiring counsel to personally appear, while simultaneously moving their client far away and out of jurisdiction, without sufficient notice, makes an already difficult representation even more burdensome.

Oregon has already endured the DHS' disastrous and violent anti-immigrant campaign, Operation Black Rose. And Oregon continues to deal with an uptick of federal immigration agents making arrests in the streets. Now, this latest string of policy changes and tactics leave immigrants unable to secure the immigration relief they are entitled to because they miss their court dates or cannot find legal representation on short notice. Arbitrary policies to appear in-person create additional burdens for immigrants, attorneys, and witnesses, and overcrowded dockets severely limit judges' abilities to make fair and accurate determinations. Your administration's effort to ram cases through the courts is clearly designed to prevent people from being able to fight for their cases in a fair manner, and that is inherently un-American. Immigration court proceedings must uphold fairness and rule of law and not be politicized to satisfy Donald Trump's arbitrary detention quotas.

We call on the Trump administration to discontinue policies and tactics that undermine constitutional due process. Our legal system relies on accountability; therefore, we demand that you establish fair and meaningful hearings that provide a genuine day in court and uphold the integrity of our nation's immigration system. We ask that you provide a written response by October 15, 2026, detailing the steps you will take to terminate "mega master" hearings, provide immigrants with sufficient notice of their proceedings, reduce hardships on immigration attorneys, and ensure that immigration judges hear cases individually, free from political influence. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your response.

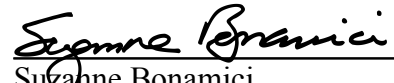
Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



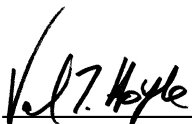
Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



Janelle S. Bynum
Member of Congress



Maxine Dexter, M.D.
Member of Congress



Val Hoyle
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Markwayne Mullin, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security
The Honorable Joseph B. Edlow, Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services