

For Immediate Release

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Immigrant Rights Groups FOIA for Info on ICE's Chicago Vigilante Training

New York/Chicago — On Thursday, the Immigrant Defense Project (IDP), Organized Communities Against Deportations (OCAD) and the Center for Constitutional Rights filed a [Freedom of Information Act Request](#) to demand more information on the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's announcement of a pilot Enforcement and Removals Operation (ERO) Citizen Academy to be held in Chicago over a six-week period starting in mid-September of this year. The request also asks for information on past ICE "citizen academies" held in other cities, which have recently come to light.

At a time when the nation is being forced to grapple with systemic police violence, ICE has [invited](#) civilians in Chicago to engage "in scenario-based training and exercises conducted in a safe and positive environment, including, but not limited to defensive tactics, firearms familiarization, and targeted arrests." This has raised alarm with [OCAD](#) as well as other [immigrant rights organizers](#) and advocates in Chicago who see the trainings as potentially encouraging vigilantes to profile and target people in their communities.

A hallmark of the Trump administration has been the campaign of terror waged against migrants at the border and increased ICE raids at homes, on the street, at courthouses, and in workplaces. The administration has used escalated ICE presence in cities with policies that limit police collaboration with ICE, such as Chicago and New York, to threaten and intimidate these cities.

Of additional concern to the organizations is that ICE ERO is planning to hold this initial Academy in Chicago and include "scenario-based training and exercises" on firearms familiarization, just three years after ICE agents [shot an individual in Chicago](#) during a raid. That same year community groups exposed [ICE's use of Chicago Police Department resources](#), such as the Citizen and Law Enforcement Analysis and Reporting (CLEAR) system to target

immigrant communities. In 2018, it was reported that [ICE detained more than 150 individuals](#) in the Chicagoland area in cases where the agency did not have administrative warrants or reasonable suspicion to take people into custody. A pending lawsuit alleges this type of enforcement was fueled by “racial profiling.”

The Immigrant Defense Project has documented ICE tactics for the past seven years, and, in the first few months of 2020 alone, ICE massively escalated their raids in the New York City region—[at a rate of 400% greater than the previous three months](#)—with increasingly aggressive tactics, including shooting a bystander in the face, pulling teenagers out of cars and holding guns on them, and waving an assault rifle on a Bronx street. Through analyzing the over [1400 reports of ICE raids](#) reported to IDP as well as reviewing [ICE memos, guidances, trainings and internal documents](#) received via [FOIA litigation](#), IDP found that ICE policies and strategies encourage and justify overly-aggressive policing tactics, widespread surveillance, and a disregard for constitutional and human rights.

“It is outrageous at a time when many are condemning the violence of policing and efforts to defund police are gaining momentum, that ICE would invest in training civilians to embrace and support their criminalizing and dehumanizing agenda,” said Mizue Aizeki, Deputy Director of the Immigrant Defense Project. “When ICE recruits local police to serve as immigration agents, racial profiling and civil rights abuses persist. Recruiting civilians into ICE missions is similarly problematic, threatening community safety and encouraging vigilantism.”

“Trainings like this are part of strategies used by law enforcement to normalize violence and spread propaganda under the guise of improving community relations. This is a program designed to institutionalize ICE’s actions such as the use of firearms, use of violence, and questionable tactics that lead to the separation of families in Chicago and across the country. Law enforcement agencies like ICE can’t improve community relations when they are part of the problem, they need to be dismantled.” - Rey Wences, community organizer with OCAD.

[Click here to read the FOIA request.](#)

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About the Immigrant Defense Project

The Immigrant Defense Project (IDP) is a New York-based nonprofit that works to secure fairness and justice for immigrants in the racially-biased U.S. criminal and immigration systems.

IDP fights to end the current era of unprecedented mass criminalization, detention and deportation through a multi-pronged strategy including advocacy, litigation, legal support, community partnerships, and strategic communications. Visit www.immigrantdefenseproject.org and follow @ImmDefense.

About Organized Communities Against Deportations

Organized Communities Against Deportations (OCAD) is an undocumented-led group that organizes against deportations, detention, criminalization, and incarceration, of Black, brown, and immigrant communities in Chicago, Illinois and surrounding areas since 2013. Through grassroots organizing, legal and policy work, direct action, and cross-movement building OCAD fights alongside families and individuals to stop deportations and to create an environment for undocumented communities to thrive, work, and organize with happiness and without fear. Visit www.organizedcommunities.org and follow @OCAD_CHI.

About the Center for Constitutional Rights

The Center for Constitutional Rights is dedicated to advancing and protecting the rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Founded in 1966 by attorneys who represented civil rights movements in the South, CCR is a non-profit legal and educational organization committed to the creative use of law as a positive force for social change. Visit www.ccrjustice.org and follow @theCCR.