



**FREE MIGRATION
PROJECT**



For Immediate Release

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Immigrant Rights Groups Demand Government Records On Recent Onslaught of Civil Penalties Against Immigrants in Sanctuary

Excessive and Retaliatory Fines Target Sanctuary Seekers and Activists

September 20, 2019, New York, NY – Austin Sanctuary Network, the Center for Constitutional Rights, Free Migration Project, and Grassroots Leadership [demand records](#) from the Trump Administration on the recent spate of exorbitant civil fines against people who have chosen to take sanctuary while pursuing their legal remedies to remain in the U.S. An unknown number of people in sanctuary received notices for 'failure to depart' this past summer, according to the groups. Advocates first became aware of this practice, enabled by a seldom-used provision of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), in July 2019, when a number of people in sanctuary received notices of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)'s intent to fine them within a matter of weeks, to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars each.

Edith Espinal Moreno, an immigration activist and sanctuary seeker in Ohio, received such a notice on June 25, 2019. "I am happy that people who support me and others living in sanctuary are fighting to uncover all of the information that we know exists that proves that the Trump administration is purposefully retaliating against us because we are living in sanctuary. I want everyone to know that we are not going to let the government scare us into staying silent," said Espinal Moreno, who has been in sanctuary since October 2017.

Austin Sanctuary Network, Free Migration Project, and Grassroots Leadership work closely with people who have received such "intent to fine" letters. The groups, along with the Center For Constitutional Rights, filed a request under the Freedom of Information Act, which requires the U.S. Government to provide copies of certain non-public documents to interested parties. The groups are seeking a broad array of information from ICE, the U.S. Department of the Treasury, and the U.S. Department of Justice Executive Office for Immigration Review, including records relating to current policies, procedures, guidelines, and other materials documenting when and how civil fines and penalties under INA § 274D, 8 U.S.C. §1324d, the provision of the INA that allows ICE to levy these steep fines, are being enforced against individuals.

"They want to traumatize us psychologically and I will fight for my case for both myself and my son," said **Hilda Ramirez**, an activist and leader of Austin Sanctuary Network, who also received an "intent to fine" notice after taking sanctuary in an Austin, Texas church for almost four years. "ICE very well knows we don't have that amount of money. We don't have money, we don't have anything. I need help from Congressmen and our whole community because this is an injustice. We don't have a normal life. That's all we want."

Lizbeth Mateo, a lawyer representing Ms. Espinal Moreno, raised concerns about the legality and motives behind the fines. "It is no secret that the Trump administration has regarded the practice of providing sanctuary to immigrants as a lawless one and has vowed to end it. But it is the government that has violated the law by trying to impose exorbitant fines in an effort to intimidate and silence immigrants who dare speak against this administration's treatment of immigrants. My client Edith and I are confident that with the help of the Center for Constitutional Rights and the other organizations that have joined this records request, we will be able to



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prove what we have known for a while – that this administration is retaliating against sanctuary leaders like Edith,” said Mateo.

"The Center for Constitutional Rights is proud to stand with the immigrant community and support our organizational partners in shining a light on this administration's cruel and outrageous policy of fining immigrants, in particular those who have chosen to take sanctuary," said [Ian Head](#), who coordinates the [Open Records Project](#) at the Center for Constitutional Rights.

For more information about the requesting organizations, please visit:

<https://austinsanctuarynetwork.org>

<https://freemigrationproject.org>

<http://grassrootsleadership.org>

<https://ccrjustice.org>

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