



For immediate release: October 22, 2019

Contact: Austin Sanctuary Network | leadership@austinsanctuarynetwork.org

ICE Withdraws Exorbitant Fines Imposed on Some Women Living in Sanctuary Across the Country

The fines ranging from \$300,000 to \$500,000 were withdrawn earlier this week

AUSTIN, TX — Almost four months after Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) first issued notice of fines ranging between \$300,000 - \$500,000 to seven women living in sanctuary in churches across the country, ICE has withdrawn the fines. In a letter sent to the families, ICE stated “following consideration of matters you forwarded for ICE review, and in the exercise of discretion under applicable regulations, ICE hereby withdraws the Notice of Intention to Fine.”

“This is not just a victory for the National Sanctuary Collective, but it’s also a testament as to why it’s so important that affected community members lead and speak out. These families have put themselves willingly on the front lines of this administration’s attacks. They are not only fighting for their own freedom but to protect all immigrant families,” said **Claudia Muñoz** of the Grassroots Leadership, a member of the National Sanctuary Collective. “These women have drawn a line in the sand, and our hope is that with their bold actions and their voices, they have prevented fines like this from being issued against all undocumented people.”

“We knew that these exorbitant fines were illegal and were nothing more than a tool to scare our clients and retaliate against them for fighting back and standing up to this administration.” said **Lizbeth Mateo**, attorney for a sanctuary mother from Ohio. “We know we have strong legal arguments and ICE recognizes that, even if they claim that this decision was based only on discretion. But even if that were the case, ICE has demonstrated with this that they have the power to exercise discretion—the same way they can use discretion to drop these fines, they can use it to release the sanctuary families.”

“This is an example of what speaking out and organizing can accomplish,” said **Edith Espinal**, who has been living in Sanctuary in Columbus, OH since October 2017. “We have been begging Senator Brown and others to fight with us, but so far he has refused to stand on the side of justice. It’s heartbreaking to see our elected officials, people like Senator Brown and other

Democratic leaders, ignore our pleas. When my daughter traveled to Washington, DC in September to meet with elected officials, she was told that families in Sanctuary were not a priority.”

Despite the lack of a clear champion in congress, Sanctuary families and their attorneys worked diligently to fight against these illegal and exorbitant fines. “Although this is a great legal victory, it was the leadership of those in sanctuary that made this possible. As attorneys, we can and will always fight back against Trump’s anti-immigrant policies, but this victory would not have happened without the leaders showing so much courage and determination.” said **Barbara Hines**, former director of the UT Law School Immigration Clinic.

“If any of the Congressional offices we have been pleading with had done any research, they would have known that we had the law on our side,” said **Hilda Ramirez**, who has been living in sanctuary in Austin, TX with her 11-year old son Ivan, for over two years. “For the last three months, our supporters have met with members of Congress in Washington, DC and they have all made it very clear that people like me and my son Ivan are not a priority for them. I really hope that with this victory, these members of Congress can finally show the same courage we have shown and stand with us. That is all we are asking for—stand with us and fight with us, like real leaders should.”

###

The National Sanctuary Collective is comprised of immigrants in sanctuary, immigrant organizers, attorneys, and allies in faith communities spanning seven states—Texas, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Virginia.