



THE
SIKH COALITION

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS:

**Immigration Guidance for
Gurdwaras**

Updated February 2025

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This 'Know Your Rights' resource is meant to help gurdwarae and gurdwara committee members or leadership understand potential immigration enforcement at our houses of worship. It will be updated regularly as new immigration policies continue to emerge from the Trump Administration. It was compiled by the Sikh Coalition with assistance from immigration attorneys and immigration policy experts within the sangat and from allied organizations.

Please note that this information is not intended as legal advice. If you need specific and immediate legal aid, contact the Sikh Coalition at www.sikhcoalition.org/legal-help or see our resource list below.

View our immigration 'Know Your Rights' resource for individuals [here](#). You can learn more about the Sikh Coalition's immigration policy principles and read our community FAQ in [this document](#).



Introduction

For many years, a DHS policy helped protect houses of worship (including gurdwarae) and other “sensitive locations” from ICE questioning, detaining, arresting individuals, or carrying out other immigration enforcement actions. However, as of January 21, 2025, the Trump Administration has eliminated this long-standing policy, now allowing gurdwarae to potentially be targeted by armed ICE agents.

ICE requires a warrant, signed by a judge, to enter a private space (like a home or a workplace). Whether or not ICE requires a warrant to enter a gurdwara is a difficult question, because gurdwarae are generally open to the public. After talking with Sikh attorneys and other attorneys, we have three main conclusions:

1. ICE does not necessarily need a warrant to enter a gurdwara—it depends on when they visit the gurdwara, and where they want to visit inside of it.
2. Once ICE is in a gurdwara, it matters if they are asked for a warrant and then, if they do not have one, asked to leave. This may lead to them leaving the premises.
3. No one in the gurdwara is required to speak to ICE, and everyone has the right to remain silent and the right to an attorney if they are detained.

The information below expands upon these conclusions and offers additional resources. We will continue to update it as we learn more.



Does ICE Require a Warrant to Enter Gurdwaras?

- ICE's ability to enter a gurdwara depends on when they visit the gurdwara:
 - If the gurdwara is physically closed in such a way that members of the sangat could *not* walk in, ICE likely needs a warrant to enter the gurdwara.
 - If the gurdwara is open to the public and/or if large numbers of sangat are coming in and out of the building, ICE may not need a warrant to enter the gurdwara.
- ICE's ability to search within gurdwara depends on where they are trying to go inside the facility:
 - Spaces like divan halls and langar halls are general public spaces. ICE can search these spaces without a warrant.
 - ICE would need a warrant to search spaces within the gurdwara that are clearly marked as 'private' or are typically not available to sangat should be considered private. (See **“Helpful Gurdwara Security Measures”** on page 9)
- No matter when ICE comes to your gurdwara, you can and should ask them for identification. They must provide identification; if they do not, you do not have to speak to them.



- During periods when the gurdwara is not open to the sangat, keeping the gurdwara door closed may help maintain it as a private space in the eyes of the law—which means ICE agents would need a warrant.
- If ICE comes to your gurdwara and the door is closed, you can keep the door closed and ask them for a warrant. You could say the following: “Slide the warrant under the door.”
 - If the paper ICE shows you says “U.S. Department of Homeland Security” on the upper left corner, **this is not a valid judicial warrant.**
 - Do not open the door.
 - Do not answer any questions.
 - Tell them you will not open the door and stay inside.
 - An “administrative warrant,” which does not allow ICE to enter a private space, looks like [this](#).
 - If the paper ICE shows says “U.S. District Court” or the name of an actual court in your county and state, you must **check the document** to see if there is a **judge’s signature** on the document.
 - A search warrant looks like [this](#).
 - An arrest warrant will also have the name of someone who is alleged to be staying at the gurdwara; it looks like [this](#).
 - If the warrant you are shown does not have a judge’s signature, do not open the door.



- First, ask to see ICE’s identification before engaging with them. You could say the following: “Please show me identification to verify that you are a member of law enforcement.”
- If ICE refuses to show their identification, you do not have to engage with them and you may ask them to leave.
- If ICE shows you their identification, ask if they have a warrant.
 - See above (“**If ICE Comes to Your Gurdwara When it is Closed**” on page 5) to learn about the different types of warrants.
 - If ICE has a valid warrant, they can search the gurdwara.
 - If ICE does not have a valid warrant, you may ask them to leave.
- Regardless of whether or not ICE has a warrant, it is important for sangat members to know that:
 - They should stay calm; ICE can use running as a reason to detain and arrest sangat members.
 - Gurdwara security should not attempt to stop ICE or interfere with their operations—if they do, they will likely be detained and possibly charged if law enforcement is present with ICE.
 - Sangat members always have the right to remain silent, and no one has to discuss their immigration or citizenship status or the immigration or citizenship status of others with ICE or other law enforcement.

If ICE Comes to Your Gurdwara When it is Open

- If sangat members are detained by ICE:
 - Anyone has the right to request interpretation in their native language. If they do not speak English fluently or at all, they are not required to communicate in English and can ask for interpretation in their preferred language.
 - Anyone detained by ICE has the right to speak with an attorney, but the government will NOT appoint one for you.
- Sangat members have the right to record ICE agents. Recordings may be especially valuable if ICE forces their way into a closed gurdwara without a warrant, or if ICE acts in a disrespectful or aggressive manner towards sangat members or the gurdwara facility itself.



Unknown Individuals at the Gurdwara

- While gurdwaras are, by nature, open and welcoming to strangers, be cautious around unknown individuals who are new to the gurdwara and are asking questions about:
 - The size of the sangat
 - The immigration status of members of the sangat, specifically or in general
 - The employees of the gurdwara and their immigration status
 - Whether or not any individuals stay at the gurdwara and their immigration status
- Such individuals could be:
 - ICE or other law enforcement wearing regular clothes
 - Representatives or associates of the Indian government, which has previously tried to use immigration pressure to discourage certain kinds of Sikh activism and political speech
 - Members of the public looking to report the sangat to ICE or other law enforcement authorities
- Note that individuals at the gurdwara for nefarious purposes may be Punjabi and/or speak Punjabi.
- If such an individual is found at your gurdwara,
 - Ask them if they are members of law enforcement and, if so, to show their identification
 - Ask them to leave
 - Discourage other sangat members from speaking to them or answering their questions, even if you feel you have appropriate documentation and are doing nothing wrong
 - Alert other local gurdwaras to the presence of this individual and their questioning
 - Save security camera footage for future reference, if possible



Helpful Gurdwara Security Measures

- Appoint a committee member as the designated lead on immigration issues, including for:
 - Serving as the primary person to speak with potential ICE agents and review their identification and/or any warrants they claim to have
 - Discussing immigration concerns with specific sangat members and connecting them to legal or other resources
 - Coordinating with area gurdwarae and external groups to share information
- As mentioned above, gurdwarae are meant to be open and welcoming by nature. Physical security enhancements (see the Sikh Coalition’s [Gurdwara Security Toolkit](#)), however, can help keep gurdwarae safe from ICE raids and the civil rights abuses that can occur when they happen.
- Regardless, consider marking spaces within the gurdwara or complex that are clearly designated with signs that say “Private.” As discussed above, areas that are marked private are harder for ICE to justify entry without consent or a warrant.
- Consider a peephole, video doorbell, or other means by which gurdwara leadership could potentially speak with ICE agents without physically opening the door.
- Security cameras, also useful for deterring hate crimes or vandalism, can be useful for recording interactions with ICE agents.
- Ensure granthis, committee members, and frequent gurdwara sevadaars are made aware of their rights and best practices.



In Case of Detention

- If a member of your sangat has been detained, they are processed at the local ICE Field Office before being transferred to a detention facility. You can locate them through this website: locator.ice.gov
- Once an arrest is made, acting quickly is imperative.
 - The Sikh Coalition is working to collate a list of Punjabi-speaking immigration attorneys. Email immigration@sikhcoalition.org if you are in need of such a referral.
- Other organizations and resources that can help you find an immigration attorney include but are not limited to:
 - Department of Justice, Executive Office for Immigration Review: <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/list-pro-bono-legal-service-providers>
 - The Immigration Defense Project: <https://www.immigrantdefenseproject.org/>
 - ImmigrationLawHelp.org: <https://www.immigrationlawhelp.org/>
 - National Immigrant Justice Center: <http://www.immigrantjustice.org/>
 - American Immigration Lawyers Association: <https://www.aila.org/>
 - National Lawyers Guild: <https://www.nlg.org/>
 - National Immigration Project: <https://nipnlg.org/>
 - National Immigration Advocates Directory: <https://www.immigrationadvocates.org/legaldirectory/>



Alternative Resources for Individuals in Need

- Individuals who are concerned about their immigration status may not seek support through official channels for fear of interrogation, detention, or deportation. Sangat can freely discuss any of the below resources with the [Sikh Family Center](#) for more support and be better informed about their options.

Suggested Avenues For Alternative Support

- The [Immigration Defense Project](#) hotline 212-725-6422
 - This hotline can be used for:
 - Limited immigration legal advice and information
 - Referrals for free immigration legal services
 - Referrals for private immigration attorneys
 - This is not a live helpline—you can leave a voicemail and they will call you back.
- The Sikh Family Center's Non-Emergency Helpline: 866-SFC-SEWA (866-732-7392)
 - This non-emergency helpline is by and for the Sikh community—it is free, private, and available in Punjabi and English.
 - You can leave a voicemail and they will call you back.
- For domestic violence, [The National Domestic Violence Hotline](#): 1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7233)
- For suicide, the National Hopeline Network: Dial 988
- For self-Injury, [S.A.F.E. Alternatives](#): 1-800-DON'T-CUT (1-800-366-8288)
- For substance use, the [24/7 Treatment Referral line](#): 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)



THE SIKH COALITION

immigration@sikhcoalition.org
www.sikhcoalition.org

**Scan the QR Code to view all of
Sikh Coalition's Immigration
Know Your Rights Resources**

