



If a loved one is arrested by immigration

What to do in the first hours, what happens next, and what the motions and filings are, in plain words.

Breathe first. This is one of the hardest moments a family can live through. You cannot do everything today, and you do not have to. Do the steps in order, one at a time, and ask for help.

The first hours, in order

- 1 Find them.** Go to locator.ice.gov with the A-number (or name and country of birth). If they are not listed yet, try again in a few hours. People are often held first at an ICE office and moved later, sometimes far away.
- 2 Call a lawyer today.** Free help: ActionNYC 800-354-0365 (or 311). Give the full name, date of birth, A-number and where they were arrested. Do not pay anyone who promises a quick “fix”. A notario is not a lawyer.
- 3 Gather the papers:** passport and ID, any immigration papers (Notice to Appear, work permit, receipts, court notices), proof of how long they have lived here, and the contact details of anyone who can vouch for them.
- 4 Plan for the children and the home.** Who picks up the children? Who has the keys, the rent, the bills? Write it down and tell that person today.
- 5 Write what happened:** date, place, who arrested them, whether they showed a warrant, and anything that was said. Do this while the memory is fresh.
- 6 Tell one person you trust,** and call us if you want company: (561) 445-6141.

Please avoid. Do not sign papers, for yourself or your family member, before a lawyer reads them (voluntary departure, “stipulated removal”, anything you do not understand). Do not give ICE more information about the family. Do not post the case on social media without the person’s consent. Do not go to an ICE office or court without a lawyer if you have your own immigration risk.



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What happens next

Arrest and processing	Hours to days. ICE takes fingerprints and photos and decides where the person will be held. A transfer to another state can happen quickly.
Custody decision	ICE may release the person, set a bond, or keep them detained. Whether a bond hearing is possible depends on how and when they entered, and on rules that are changing now. The lawyer will tell you.
Notice to Appear and first hearing	The Notice to Appear starts the court case. The first hearing (master calendar) is usually within a few weeks if the person is detained. The judge asks if they have a lawyer and what they will ask for.
Bond hearing, if allowed	An immigration judge decides if the person can be released and for how much. The lawyer and the family prepare proof of address, ties and support.
Hearing on the case	The person asks for protection or permission to stay (asylum, cancellation of removal, a family petition, and others), with evidence and a sworn statement.
Decision and appeal	The judge decides. Either side can appeal to the Board of Immigration Appeals, usually within 30 days. Do not let this date pass.

If the person has a final order of removal, or was arrested at the border or soon after entering, things can move in days. Call a lawyer immediately and say so.

Keep this in one place

Full name	_____
A-number	_____
Date and place of arrest	_____
Where they are held now	_____
Lawyer and phone	_____
Next court date	_____



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Motions and filings in plain words

Bond motion (custody redetermination)	Asks the judge to set a bond or release the person while the case continues (custody redetermination). An ICE request to be released can also be made to the field office.
Motion for continuance	Asks for more time, for example to find a lawyer or gather evidence.
Motion to change venue	Asks to move the case to the court nearest where the person lives.
Motion to terminate	Asks the judge to end the case because the government did not meet its legal burden.
Motion to reopen	Asks to reopen a case that ended, for example a deportation order made when the person did not receive notice. Strict time limits apply, often 90 days, and a few exceptions exist.
Emergency stay of removal	Asks ICE, the judge or the Board to pause a deportation that is about to happen. Used when there is little time.
Appeal to the Board (BIA)	Asks the Board of Immigration Appeals to review the judge's decision. Usually due within 30 days.
Habeas corpus petition	Filed in a federal court. It does not decide the immigration case. It asks a federal judge whether the detention itself is lawful.
Request for prosecutorial discretion	Asks the government lawyers to close or dismiss the case, based on the person's ties and circumstances.
FOIA request	Asks the government for a copy of the person's immigration file, which helps the lawyer.

Time limits depend on the case. Only a lawyer can say which filing fits and when it is due.



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| Get ready before anything happens

- Keep copies of every immigration paper in one folder, and one copy with a trusted person.
- Memorize or write the A-number and a lawyer's phone number, and keep it in your wallet.
- Make a childcare plan, and ask a lawyer about a standby guardian and a power of attorney.
- Keep a list of emergency contacts and the lawyer or hotline numbers on the fridge and in each phone.
- Know your rights: you may stay silent and ask for a lawyer. Our red card has them in short form.
- Talk with the family about this plan before an emergency, calmly, and together.

| Where to find help

Dignity Toolkit

(561) 445-6141, call or text

Find a detained person

locator.ice.gov · MDC Brooklyn 718-840-4200

Free legal help (ActionNYC)

800-354-0365 or 311

Emotional support, 24 hours

Call or text 988 (press 2 for Spanish)

General information, not legal advice. Rules, bond access and deadlines change often, so confirm with a lawyer. Reviewed October 25, 2026.