



RELEASE

## ACLU of Massachusetts joins lawsuit to protect rights of workers swept away in last week's raid

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**BOSTON** – Calling the rushed mass transfer of people detained in last week's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid at a New Bedford factory an abuse of power, the ACLU of Massachusetts (ACLUM) has joined a lawsuit filed in federal court for a writ of habeas corpus and for injunctive and declaratory relief.

The lawsuit alleges that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) violated the rights of workers when it conducted a massive raid last week. Since the immigration raid, hundreds of individuals have been shipped out to detention centers as far away as Texas and Florida, leaving behind devastated and distraught families. The lawsuit alleges, among other things, that despite assurances from ICE to the contrary, attorneys and the Department of Social Services have been denied meaningful access to the workers and have been unable to provide the support they were willing and able to provide.

Last week, lawyers from several groups raced against the clock to file an emergency petition for the detainees to remain in Massachusetts, only to find that ICE put most of them on planes and flew them out of the state. "It's unfortunate that federal immigration officials were so quick to ship people out of state that any attempts at keeping the detainees from being transferred out of Massachusetts was impossible," said ACLUM's Equal Justice Works Fellow, Anjali Waikar.

The raid took place early in the morning on Tuesday, March 6, 2007, at the Michael Bianco, Inc., plant in New Bedford, where workers were busy stitching armored vests and backpacks for U.S. soldiers. The owner and managers of the factory were charged criminally for conspiring to hire illegal immigrants, but they were quickly released from custody that same day and have since been allowed to travel to Puerto Rico for a business meeting.

Many of the workers had small children who were in daycare or school when the raids took place and found themselves without parents that evening. Advocates know of at least 70 detained parents of minor children and estimate that at least 210 children have been impacted by the raid.

"These people work hard to care for their families, and their job is to provide armor for our troops," said ACLUM attorney Laura Rótolo. "While the company's managers were released and sleeping in their own beds on the same day they were arrested, the workers were separated from their families and transferred halfway across the country." Rótolo was at the detention facility until 4 am the night after the raid as part of a legal team attempting to help detainees.

"The ACLU of Massachusetts denounces these tactics, which not only ignore people's rights but are carried out so quickly that there is not even time to assert those rights," said Executive Director Carol Rose. "This is an abuse of power, and children are now suffering because of the government's misguided rush to eject people."

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