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**\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\*\***

***Legal Aid, NYCLU, Make the Road NY, and Covington & Burling LLP File Class Action Lawsuit Against DHS for Unlawful Stops, Warrantless Immigration Arrests, and Racial Profiling of New Yorkers***

***Lawsuit Alleges DHS Agencies Including ICE and CBP Unlawfully Target Latino New Yorkers and People of Color for Stops, Detentions***

(NEW YORK, NY) — The Legal Aid Society, the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), Make the Road New York, and Covington & Burling LLP filed a class action [lawsuit](#) in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York challenging the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) policy and practice of conducting suspicionless stops of New Yorkers based solely on their perceived race and ethnicity and warrantless immigration arrests without probable cause.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of eight Latino New Yorkers who were unlawfully stopped and arrested by agents from DHS's component agencies U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or Customs and Border Protection (CBP) while going about their daily lives, as well as on behalf of the Workers' Center of Central New York. The complaint alleges the individual plaintiffs were targeted by federal agents based on racial profiling, in violation of multiple federal laws and regulations that prohibit federal agents from using a person's race as justification for arresting or detaining them.

ICE and CBP agents regularly violate laws that require reasonable suspicion of an immigration violation before agents can detain someone and routinely ignore constitutional and statutory limits on their arrest authority, according to the lawsuit. Federal law also requires agents to have probable cause of both an immigration violation and a likelihood of escape before making a warrantless arrest.

According to the complaint, ICE and CBP agents, together with other federal agents cooperating with them, are unlawfully stopping and arresting thousands of Black and Brown people – the vast majority of whom are Latino or Hispanic – in an effort to meet the Trump Administration's sky-high immigration arrest quotas.

In just the first six months of the second Trump Administration alone, immigration officials arrested 2,888 noncitizens in the greater New York City area, more than triple the number of arrests in the last six months of the previous administration. Since then, these suspicionless stops and warrantless immigration arrests have continued

unabated within New York City and around the state. The lawsuit alleges federal immigration agents rarely have a lawful basis to believe the person they stop is in violation of immigration laws and consistently make arrests with no regard for a person's immigration status or community ties.

As a result of the increased enforcement, the lawsuit states, immigrant communities throughout New York are living under a state of siege. The widespread targeting of New Yorkers merely going about their usual routines – such as going to work, driving their kids to school, or shopping at the grocery store – has led many, including U.S. citizens and those with lawful status, to limit their activities out of fear that they will be unlawfully stopped.

“New Yorkers should be able to go about their daily lives without fear of being targeted by masked federal agents because of the color of their skin,” said **New York Attorney General Letitia James**. “This policy of racial profiling is illegal and unconscionable. I am proud to stand in support of these plaintiffs and advocates as they fight to uphold the Constitution and protect the rights of every New Yorker.”

“ICE is profiling and arresting Black and Brown New Yorkers based solely on their appearance. This is an egregious violation of their civil rights, that has caused fear and panic to ripple throughout New York's immigrant communities,” said **Meghna Philip, Director of the Special Litigation Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “This lawlessness must come to an end, and the federal government must be held accountable for its abuse of authority. Our clients, and all New Yorkers, deserve to go about their daily lives and routines without fear of arbitrary and discriminatory surveillance, detention, and family separation.”

“For over a year, immigration agents have treated our state like a constitution-free zone, unlawfully profiling and detaining Black and Brown New Yorkers in service of Trump's deportation agenda,” said **Amy Belsher, Director of Immigrants' Rights Litigation at the New York Civil Liberties Union**. “New Yorkers going about their lives -- heading to work, taking their kids to school, or grocery shopping -- must now fear being suddenly snatched by masked agents and arrested without probable cause. These practices are discriminatory, unconstitutional, and an affront to the rights of all New Yorkers. We are confident the court will hold this administration's immigration officials accountable.”

**Harold Solis, Co-Legal Director of Make the Road New York**, said, “For months, ICE has unlawfully detained Black and Brown New Yorkers in public without explanation, notice, or due process—often based on nothing more than how they look. Our clients experienced this firsthand. Many of them were detained for doing what countless New Yorkers do every day: driving their child to school, pumping gas, or going to work. The pain they suffered was the foreseeable result of an unlawful policy driven by unlawful motives and deportation quotas, not the Constitution or the rule of law. This lawsuit seeks to re-affirm the most basic guarantees that protect everyone against government agents who would otherwise deprive someone of their liberty merely based on bias.”

### **Plaintiffs:**

**Rene Antonio Benitez** is a 36-year-old Latino resident of Brentwood, New York who has resided in the state for almost 14 years. On February 26, ICE agents stopped and arrested him without a warrant while he was driving his daughter to school. Later that day, attorneys filed a petition for a writ of habeas corpus on his behalf – which asks the court to order the government to explain why someone is being held – and Mr. Benitez was released back to Long Island. He continues to drive around Brentwood and the surrounding area to take his daughter to school, to go to work, and to perform other daily activities. Due to his Latino ethnicity, Mr. Benitez fears being stopped, arrested, and detained again while going about his daily life.

**J.R.H.L.** is a 47-year-old Latino resident of Wyandanch, New York, where he has lived since 2007. On June 7, 2025, ICE agents stopped and arrested him without a warrant while he was walking across the parking lot next to his home on his way to work. J.R.H.L. spent two months in ICE detention until he was granted bond by an

immigration judge and released. In accordance with ICE's electronic monitoring requirements, J.R.H.L. must submit a weekly selfie and has monthly in-person check-ins with ICE and home visits through the Intensive Supervision Appearance Program. J.R.H.L. has subsequently applied for asylum, and still lives in the same house, has the same job, and, to get to work six days a week, must cross the same parking lot where he was stopped and arrested by ICE. Due to his Latino ethnicity, J.R.H.L. fears being stopped, arrested, and detained again while going about his daily life.

**Darwin Garcia Medrano** is a 19-year-old Latino resident of Farmingdale, New York. He has been granted Special Immigrant Juvenile Status by DHS and has lived in New York since 2018. ICE agents stopped and made a warrantless arrest of him, as well as his 16-year-old brother and his friend while he was pumping gas in Brentwood, New York on January 17. Mr. Garcia Medrano spent five days in ICE detention before being released without any explanation. Mr. Garcia Medrano must regularly drive around the area to get to work and pursue his studies at Suffolk County Community College. Due to his Latino ethnicity, Mr. Garcia Medrano fears being stopped, arrested, and detained again while going about his daily life.

**H.L.A.O.** is a 46-year-old Latino resident of Greenport, New York, where he has lived for more than 20 years. On February 4, ICE agents stopped and arrested him without a warrant while he was waiting to take the Shelter Island ferry to work. H.L.A.O. spent 22 days in an ICE detention facility before being released and returning to his job. He regularly travels around the area and takes the Shelter Island ferry to work six days per week. He is currently working with his immigration attorney to apply for relief from removal. Due to his Latino ethnicity, H.L.A.O. fears being stopped, arrested, and detained again while going about his daily life.

**A.M.C.** is a 36-year-old Latino resident of Brooklyn, New York, and has lived in the state for 14 years. On February 24, ICE agents stopped and arrested A.M.C. without a warrant as he tried to enter his apartment building in Bushwick while returning home from work. A.M.C. spent seven days in ICE detention. After his release, he returned to his job, and he once again travels to work six days a week. Due to his Latino ethnicity, A.M.C. fears being stopped, arrested, and detained again while going about his daily life.

**Hesler Asaf Garcia Lanza** is a 24-year-old Latino resident of Hempstead, New York with approved Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and a related grant of deferred action, which temporarily prevents him from being deported. He has lived in New York for 15 years. On January 3, ICE agents stopped and arrested Garcia Lanza without a warrant while he was on his way to work, walking from his home to the Long Island Railroad Hempstead station. Garcia Lanza spent two days in ICE detention. After his release, he returned to his job, where he continues to travel to work five days a week by taking the same route. Due to his Latino ethnicity, Garcia Lanza fears being stopped, arrested, and detained again while going about his daily life.

**R.C.R.** is a 55-year-old Latina resident of Buffalo, New York with a pending asylum application and employment authorization. On January 24, an immigration officer stopped and arrested her and her husband, F.R.P., without a warrant in the parking lot of a Walmart in Cheektowaga, New York. On February 19, R.C.R. was released on bond and returned to Buffalo, where she must regularly travel around the Buffalo area to commute to work, take her daughter to work, and shop for necessities. Due to her Latino ethnicity, R.C.R. is at significant risk of being stopped, arrested, and detained again while going about her daily life.

**F.R.P.** is a 63-year-old Latino resident of Buffalo, New York with a pending asylum application and employment authorization. On January 24, an immigration officer stopped and arrested him and his wife, R.C.R., without a warrant in the parking lot of a Walmart in Cheektowaga, New York. On February 18, F.R.P. was released on bond. After his release, he returned to Buffalo, and he must regularly travel around the area to commute to work, take his daughter to work, visit his elderly mother, and shop for necessities. Due to his Latino ethnicity, F.R.P. is at significant risk of being stopped, arrested, and detained again while going about his daily life.

**The Workers' Center of Central New York** is a grassroots, member-based organization focused on workplace and economic justice based in Syracuse, New York, where it organizes low-wage, predominantly immigrant workers throughout Central New York and into the North Country. DHS's policies of racial profiling, suspicionless stops, and warrantless arrests have directly impaired WCCNY's ability to carry out its core organizational activities. The policies have harmed multiple WCCNY members who have been stopped and arrested by immigration officials in New York without suspicion, a warrant, or probable cause as to immigration status and/ or escape risk, and WCCNY members are likely to face detention and/ or warrantless arrests in the future. The policies have terrified WCCNY's members, deterring them from attending the organization's events and causing them to otherwise alter their daily lives.

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*The Legal Aid Society is a nonprofit law firm that exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For 150 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of the people we serve and helps improve our communities.*

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*[Make the Road New York](#) (MRNY) builds the power of immigrant and working class communities to achieve dignity and justice through organizing, policy innovation, transformative education, and survival services. We have 30,000+ members and operate five community centers in Bushwick, Brooklyn; Jackson Heights, Queens; Port Richmond, Staten Island; Brentwood, Long Island; and White Plains, Westchester County.*

*The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) advances civil rights and civil liberties so that all New Yorkers can live with dignity, liberty, justice, and equality. Founded in 1951 as the New York state affiliate of the national ACLU, our work is rooted in the unrealized promise of the Bill of Rights and the U.S. and New York State Constitutions. With eight offices across the state and more than 90,000 member-donors, we connect movements across complex issues, informed by our communities and powered by our supporters.*