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Federal Court Blocks Trump Administration's Unlawful Civil Penalty Scheme Targeting Immigrant Families

(BOSTON, MA) — In a major victory for immigrant communities nationwide, the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts [granted](#) preliminary relief to immigrants challenging the Trump Administration's unprecedented civil penalty scheme, which sought to impose fines of up to \$998 per day — often totaling nearly \$1.8 million per person — against immigrants pursuing lawful immigration relief.

The [lawsuit](#), *Maria L. v. Mullin*, was brought by **Public Justice**, **The Legal Aid Society**, the **Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES)**, the **NYU Immigrant Rights Clinic**, **Free Migration Project**, and **Covington & Burling LLP** on behalf of two individual immigrants facing massive fines and the **Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC)** against the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the Department of Justice. The case challenged a policy affecting more than 100,000 people nationwide who have been issued more than \$84 billion in civil penalties since January 2025.

The Court held that the regulations used by the government to impose the fines are likely unlawful because ICE and DHS failed to adequately consider individual circumstances. As the Court acknowledged, “both named plaintiffs have remained in the country to pursue immigration relief that would allow them to obtain lawful status” and one “has since been approved for an immigrant visa and was admitted as a lawful permanent resident.” Without that individualized consideration, the Court held the government’s actions likely do not comply with the law. Therefore, the regulations promulgated by the government, and all fines issued after June 27, 2025, are stayed while the case moves forward. This means that the government cannot enforce these fines while the case moves forward.

Early last year, the Trump Administration revived a long-dormant provision of immigration law to issue fines of up to \$998 per day against immigrants who remained in the United States while pursuing lawful avenues to stay, including adjustment of status and other forms of immigration relief, and complying with ICE orders of supervision.

Individual plaintiffs Maria L. of Massachusetts and Nancy M. of Florida faced penalties ranging from hundreds of thousands of dollars to \$1.8 million despite maintaining contact with immigration authorities and following the legal processes available to them.

“The government is unlawfully weaponizing these fines against immigrants,” said **Charles Moore, Senior Attorney with Public Justice**. “Like many others, our clients have remained in the country to pursue lawful status. Cruelly, the government has chosen to fine them for their attempts to comply with the law. We are grateful the Court saw the unlawfulness of this program, and we look forward to vindicating the rights of all those impacted by these pernicious practices.”

“This ruling is a critical victory for immigrant families who were unlawfully threatened with financial ruin,” said **Hasan Shafiqullah, Supervising Attorney in the Civil Law Reform Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “These

finances are being assessed against people doing exactly what the law requires — seeking lawful immigration relief and complying with immigration authorities. The court correctly recognized that the government cannot impose devastating financial penalties in violation of the law.”

“ICE and CBP have been using these fines to exploit immigrants and their families,” said **Alina Das, Director of the NYU Immigrant Rights Clinic**. “This decision recognizes that federal immigration officials are not above the law and cannot weaponize debt to serve an unjust deportation agenda.”

“We join the plaintiffs and our co-counsel in celebrating this decision, which will provide relief to people impacted by these unlawful fines while the case moves forward,” said **David Bennion, Co-Director of Free Migration Project**. “These enormous fines are devastating to not just the individuals who receive them, but their families and communities.”

"This ruling confirms what we have argued all along: the government's actions are unlawful. Abusing executive power to weaponize financial insecurity does deep violence to our communities, " said **Faisal Al-Juburi, co-CEO of RAICES**. "We will not allow our people to be erased to further a false narrative that noncitizens are a threat—the damage of such actions would last for generations."

The lawsuit will continue with the stay in place. In addition to the grounds on which the district court issued the stay, Plaintiffs argue that the government’s civil penalty scheme violates multiple constitutional and statutory protections, including the Fifth Amendment’s Due Process Clause by imposing enormous fines without adequate notice, evidence, or a meaningful opportunity to challenge them; the Eighth Amendment’s prohibition on excessive fines; and the Seventh Amendment right to a jury trial.

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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 our clients and helps improve our communities.
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RAICES, formally known as the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services, is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Headquartered in Texas and with national reach, RAICES promotes migrant justice by providing legal services, social services case management, and rights advocacy for immigrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking people and families. Learn more at raicetexas.org and follow us on [Instagram](#).

Free Migration Project, a nonprofit based in Philadelphia, PA, works at the intersection of law and community organizing to promote freedom of movement as a basic human right. We provide legal services to immigrants, educate the public, litigate in the public interest, and advocate for fair and open immigration laws.