

Center for Constitutional Rights

Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

<https://ccrjustice.org/home/what-we-do/our-cases/austin-sanctuary-network-v-mayorkas>

Policy Issue Resources

Second amended complaint filed in D.C. District Court on April 25, 2022.

NYU Immigrant Rights Clinic, Just Futures Law

Free Migration Project; First Unitarian Church of Salt Lake City; Austin Sanctuary Network; Mara Chavaln Sut; Vicky Chavez; Edith Espinal; and Hilda Ramirez

Leaders of the National Sanctuary Collective and allied organizations filed a challenge ICEs practice of issuing exorbitant civil fines against people who have taken sanctuary in houses of worship, including the four women who are plaintiffs in the lawsuit. The case stems in part from [FOIA litigation](#) regarding the civil fines.

In the summer of 2019, ICE targeted high-profile activists in sanctuary all of whom fled persecution in their countries of origin with notices stating its intent to seek up to \$500,000 in fines from each of them. These notices were abruptly withdrawn, only to be re-issued several months later in 2020 against several individuals. Today, each woman faces the possibility of fines of approximately \$60,000.

Records [obtained](#) through Freedom of Information Act litigation confirmed that these fines are part of a years-long effort by high-level Trump administration officials and ICE to target sanctuary leaders. The suit argues that these records prove, along with other evidence, that ICE issued the excessive fines to sanctuary movement leaders to stop them from speaking out and participating in the sanctuary movement.

The women are bringing claims against ICE and various officials under the First and Eighth Amendments and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The leaders allege that the governments discriminatory and retaliatory issuance of these exorbitant civil fines infringes upon their rights of free speech, association, and religion, as well as their right to be free from excessive fines. They also allege that the government has violated the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The decision to take sanctuary is an act of faith. Each of the individual plaintiffs have spoken out about their decision to take sanctuary as an exercise of their religious faith and work closely with the churches that have offered them sanctuary to expose the injustices of federal immigration policies.

This case is part of the Center for Constitutional Rights' larger work on behalf of activists and immigrant rights.

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