

A Milwaukee County Circuit judge was arrested by the FBI Friday and charged in federal court for allegedly helping an undocumented immigrant avoid arrest.

Judge Hannah Dugan is facing two charges for obstruction and concealing the individual from arrest. She made an initial appearance in court and was released.

The arrest on federal charges is an escalation in the Trump administration's focus on judges' conduct, particularly as it relates to immigration enforcement. The Justice Department has repeatedly asserted that it will investigate any local officials who do not assist federal authorities on immigration matters.

"We believe Judge Dugan intentionally misdirected federal agents away from the subject to be arrested in her courthouse, Eduardo Flores-Ruiz, allowing the subject — an illegal alien — to evade arrest," FBI Director Kash Patel said on X in a post Friday morning. "Thankfully our agents chased down the perp on foot and he's been in custody since, but the Judge's obstruction created increased danger to the public."

In court on Friday, Dugan's attorney said that "Judge Dugan wholeheartedly regrets and protests her arrest. It was not made in the interest of public safety," according to the AP.

In charging documents, investigators said that plainclothes federal agents went to Dugan's courtroom on April 18 with the intention of arresting Flores-Ruiz. A Mexican immigrant, Flores-Ruiz had been removed from the United States in 2013, but immigration officials learned he was back in the country illegally because of his arrest in a local domestic abuse case.

After being informed of the agents' presence by her courtroom deputy, the judge "became visibly angry, commented that the situation was 'absurd,' left the bench, and entered chambers," court documents say.

Witnesses told investigators that Dugan confronted the federal agents in a public hallway, where she repeatedly demanded they leave, saying they needed a different kind of warrant to make the arrest. Dugan ordered the agents to speak with the chief judge of the courthouse.

Several witnesses — including Dugan's courtroom deputy and both the prosecutor and the Victim Witness Specialist on Flores-Ruiz's case — allegedly recounted seeing Dugan then direct Flores-Ruiz and his attorney to leave through a "jury door," which leads to a nonpublic area of the courthouse, court documents say.

One of the witnesses told investigators that Dugan stopped the two as they tried to exit through the normal door to the courtroom, saying something to the effect of "wait, come with me."

Flores-Ruiz and his attorney quickly exited the courthouse before the agents were able to catch up to them, investigators say. Agents found Flores-Ruiz outside the courthouse and identified themselves. He took off running but was eventually captured.

CNN has reached out to Flores-Ruiz's attorney for comment. Flores-Ruiz has not yet entered a plea to federal charges related to his efforts to evade arrest and is being detained, according to his court record. This is a separate case from the charges against Dugan.

Officials from the Trump administration quickly touted the arrest as an important step in achieving their immigration crackdown, and holding figures they view as corrupt responsible.

Attorney General Pam Bondi said in an interview on Fox News after the arrest was executed that "if you are destroying evidence and you are obstructing justice, when you have victims sitting in a courtroom of domestic violence and you are escorting a criminal defendant out the back door, it will not be tolerated."

"I think some of these judges think they are beyond and above the law, and they are not," Bondi added.

Trump's border czar Tom Homan similarly said in a post on X that "nobody should be surprised by the arrest of two judges." The second judge he is referring to is former magistrate Judge Joel Cano, who is charged with harboring three alleged gang members on his property.

"If you actively impede our enforcement efforts or if you knowingly harbor or conceal illegal aliens from ICE you will be prosecuted," he said.

Opponents of the administration, however, have attacked the arrest as a threat to the legal system.

Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, said in a statement that the Trump administration has used "dangerous rhetoric to attack and attempt to undermine our judiciary at every level," and emphasized that the "fundamental demand of justice in America" is defendants are innocent until proven guilty.

"I will continue to put my faith in our justice system as this situation plays out in the court of law," his statement reads.

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Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson says the arrest could scare residents from coming to court, undermining public safety in the city.

And democratic Rep. Gwen Moore, whose district includes Milwaukee, described Dugan's arrest as "shocking" in a statement and said it has "all the hallmarks of overreach."

"Federal law enforcement coming into a community and arresting a judge is a serious matter and would require high legal bar," said Moore, adding she was "very alarmed at this increasingly lawless actions of the Trump Administration, and in particular ICE, who have been defying courts and acting with disregard for the Constitution."