

69 Immigrant Workers Held in Baltimore Area Raids

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Body

Federal immigration agents detained **69 workers** from Latin America and Africa yesterday after **raids** on nine businesses that used a **Baltimore**-based temporary employment agency suspected of providing illegal **immigrants**, authorities said.

The **raids** on the **Baltimore area** companies were part of a stepped-up nationwide campaign by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement against firms suspected of employing illegal **immigrants**.

Agents also seized the \$600,000 bank account of Jones Industrial Network, the employment agency under investigation for allegedly supplying illegal **workers** to firms that included the sportswear manufacturer Under Armour and bonded warehouses in or near the Port of **Baltimore**.

Authorities said the Jones firm was the sole target of their criminal investigation because it bore responsibility for determining the legal status of **workers** it provided under contract. No Jones officials faced arrest or charges yesterday, they said.

At an afternoon news conference outside the shuttered Jones headquarters, a block from **Baltimore's** Inner Harbor, tearful relatives of several detained women pleaded for them to be released, saying they had young children at home or were pregnant. One man carried his 4-month-old son in a car seat.

"There was no one to pick up my little brother at school today," said Daysy Lopez, 24, an **immigrant** from Mexico, who said her mother was among those detained. Her 8-year-old brother, David, played on the sidewalk while carrying a school knapsack.

Jose Ramirez Sanchez, 30, a construction **worker** from Mexico, said his wife, Anadelia Carrillo, 28, was four months pregnant when she was arrested at her job early yesterday at a clothing warehouse operated by Under Armour, just south of **Baltimore**.

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"Instead of taking away people who are hurting the country or doing murders, they are taking away people who work hard and want this country to get ahead," Sanchez said, burying his face in his sweat shirt as he fought back tears. "They chase us like animals and say they are doing it for the good of the country."

Immigration officials, who announced the raids at a news conference in a Baltimore hotel, said that they might release as many as 20 detained workers on humanitarian grounds so they could care for their children, but that they would still face immigration charges. All were detained on suspicion of being in the United States illegally.

"We're evaluating 20 cases. We believe there may be grounds for humanitarian releases," said James Dinkins, acting special agent in charge of the Baltimore field office of ICE. Officials said they had set up a toll-free, 24-hour hotline for detainees' relatives to call for information. The number is 866-341-3858.

The raids were the latest in a series of actions. In December, several hundred people were taken into custody in raids on meatpacking plants operated by Swift & Co. in six states. This month, federal agents detained more than 300 employees of a leather goods manufacturer in New Bedford, Mass.

Yesterday, activists from CASA of Maryland, a nonprofit group that helps immigrants, as well as several labor and church representatives, asked that immigration officials halt work raids and deportations until Congress passes a comprehensive immigration reform law. They said current laws often lead to separating parents from their children, including those who are U.S.-born citizens.

Officials said the workers detained yesterday were being held and processed in Baltimore. They said some would be sent to detention centers in Maryland and Pennsylvania, except for any who are released on humanitarian grounds.

One detained woman, who was eight months pregnant and said she was not feeling well, was taken to a hospital during a raid, said ICE spokeswoman Jamie Zuieback.

Many of the workers were laborers such as offloaders and packagers. Some of the women worked labeling and packaging clothes, their relatives said. Officials said the detainees had come from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Kenya, Cameroon and Ghana.

In addition to the Jones firm, officials said the eight raided facilities were operated by Under Armour and Dixie Printing and Packaging Corp., in Anne Arundel County; Tessco Technologies and BP Castrol, in Baltimore County; and Pritchard Brown, C. Steinweg, Baltimore Metal and Commodities, and Beacon Stevedoring, all in Baltimore.

Kevin Haley, general counsel for Under Armour, told the Associated Press that the company was unaware the employees were illegal immigrants. He said the firm was "cooperating fully with law enforcement" and had been told it was not a target of the government's investigation.

"At Under Armour, we are patriots first and last and we're fully committed to compliance with all laws and regulations," Haley said. "We're furious that apparently one of the temp agencies we use was not so committed or gave the appearance of being not so committed."

Dinkins said the ICE inquiry was launched in August after investigators received an anonymous tip that illegal immigrants were working at the Port of Baltimore. He said ICE was concerned because the facilities were bonded warehouses. Such facilities are allowed to store incoming and outgoing cargo before it is examined by customs agents, during which time it is "very susceptible to substitutions and tampering," he said.

Efforts to contact Jones officials were unsuccessful, and signs in English and Spanish were taped inside the firm's front window saying it was closed for the day.

Staff writer Mary Otto contributed to this report.

Graphic

IMAGE; Photos By Steve Ruark -- Associated Press; Marc Raimondi, a spokesman for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, briefs reporters. At right, an Anne Arundel County special operations officer waits outside an Under Armour facility.

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