


**TO:** Local Education Agency Superintendents

**FROM:** Carey M. Wright, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Schools 

**DATE:** February 6, 2025

**SUBJECT:** Immigration Enforcement in Schools - Support for Families in Preparing for Emergency Situations

### **Immigration Enforcement in Schools – Standing Weekly Item**

While the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is unaware of any current plans by local U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to take immigration enforcement action within Maryland’s schools, we understand that members of our school communities are concerned about vulnerable students and families. To better equip our local education agencies (LEAs) in maintaining safe and supportive learning environments for all students, MSDE will provide essential updates, guidance, and resources through the Superintendent’s weekly memo. This week’s update focuses on family preparation. Future topics will include, but are not limited to, updated guidance for school staff, cultural competency training recommendations, and student privacy.

### **What can LEAs do to support families in preparing for emergency situations?**

Effective communication between families and schools is critical for supporting families during times of uncertainty. When families are worried about adverse immigration action, they may be more inclined to keep students at home and away from the school community. However, schools should be safe places that allow our students to feel connected to the community and ready for learning. Schools can play a key role in assuring families that their students are welcome and safe by ensuring they are well-informed, equipped with resources, and prepared to navigate emergency situations. LEAs may consider taking the following actions:

- **Suggest families develop a personal emergency response plan.**

Planning how a family may respond to immigration enforcement action before it happens may help alleviate some of the fear that prevents our students from showing up fully for learning. Consider providing resources that guide families through this planning, such as the [“Preparing Your Family for Immigration Enforcement”](#) guide from the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center<sup>1</sup> or the [safety planning information](#) produced by CASA.

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<sup>1</sup> Be aware that resources from other states may have state specific information that is only applicable in that jurisdiction.

- **Inform families about “Standby Guardianship”.**

Families may be fearful about what will happen to their child if the parent or guardian is detained. In Maryland, parents may designate a standby guardian. A standby guardian is a person appointed by a parent to take care of the child in specific situations, such as when the parent is subject to an adverse immigration action. Standby guardianship does not affect the custody of a child, and parents do not lose their parental rights by appointing a standby guardian. More information about this process can be found at the [People’s Law Library of Maryland](#).

- **Provide families with information about their basic rights.**

Providing school communities with “Know Your Rights” information will empower students and families to advocate on their own behalf if faced with potential immigration enforcement activities. Consider sharing resources such as:

- The Immigrant Legal Resource Center’s (ILRC’s) [Red Cards](#) which offer tips for interacting with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents and outline rights under the U.S. Constitution. Schools can share these cards with families and students, electronically or in print. Printable Red Cards are available in multiple languages.
- The American Civil Liberties Union’s (ACLU’s) "[Know Your Rights: Immigrant Rights Scenarios](#)" equip school staff and families with steps to take during encounters with immigration enforcement.
- [Know Your Rights: A Guide to Your Rights When Interacting with Law Enforcement](#) provides additional information for families regarding their rights.

- **Share contact information for a trusted point of contact in the LEA for families who may face language barriers.**

Advocating for oneself is challenging at the best of times, but language access issues can present an additional barrier to reassuring and serving our families. By designating LEA contacts who can work with families experiencing language access issues, schools can minimize confusion and miscommunication during high-stress situations, particularly when families are dealing with anxiety.

- **Communicate messaging and resources to staff members who work closely with vulnerable populations.**

By offering these resources and fostering strong partnerships between schools and families, schools can help ensure families are better prepared, informed, and supported. However, school staff need to be made aware of LEA policies and resources. The information in this memo should be shared with relevant staff, such as:

- Directors of Student Services
- Multilingual Learners/Title III Offices
- Pupil Personnel Workers
- School Counselors
- Community School Coordinators

### **Additional Information**

MSDE maintains information for the public about [ICE Enforcement Actions at Schools](#) on its website. Given the complex nature of immigration enforcement in schools, LEAs should consult with their legal counsel to ensure local procedures and communications are consistent with federal and State law. Policy questions about immigration enforcement in schools may be directed to Dr. Teresa Timmons-Parrott, Director of Multilingual Education and World Languages, at [teresa.timmons-parrott@maryland.gov](mailto:teresa.timmons-parrott@maryland.gov).