

Practice Pointer: How to Locate Clients Apprehended by ICE

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AILA ICE Committee

This updated practice pointer provides attorneys with best practices and tips for effectively locating clients that have been apprehended by ICE. The current U.S. immigration detention capacity for ICE is approximately [41,500 average daily beds](#) spread across more than 200 ICE facilities. These include county jails, dedicated ICE facilities, and private prisons. As further expansion of ICE's detention capacity may increase challenges in locating your clients, AILA will continue to monitor developments in this space.

How Does ICE Arrest Noncitizens?

Non-citizens enter ICE custody in a variety of ways and below are the 5 most common:

1. Transferred to ICE custody directly from Border Patrol custody; CBP is permitted to hold detainees [for up to 72 hours](#) before transferring them to ICE (or the Office of Refugee Resettlement for unaccompanied minors). In practice, CBP often holds noncitizen adults and families for beyond 72 hours.
2. Taken into custody at a scheduled ICE check-in or Alternative to Detention check-in.
3. At a local court or jail, when the individual is released pending resolution of a criminal case because ICE has [placed a detainer](#) on them.
4. Transfer to ICE custody from a criminal jail or federal or state prison at the conclusion of a criminal sentence, again usually as a result of a detainer that was placed on the individual.
5. Arrest by ICE at home, in public, or at a place of business as a result of a targeted enforcement operation or collateral arrest.

Locating Your Client Using the ICE Online Detainee Locator System

If your client or potential client is arrested by ICE and is 18 years of age or older (including unaccompanied young adults over 18), you should first try to confirm where your client is detained via the [ICE Online Detainee Locator System](#) (ODLS). As of [June 2024](#), you can also use ODLS to search for someone in BP Custody.

What to Know About ODLS:

- If you are representing a client with a pending T or U visa or VAWA self-petition, your client may not appear in ODLS, and you should contact the local ICE field office to confirm your client's whereabouts. Additionally, if it has been less than 72-hours since a client was taken into custody, ODLS will not show the detention facility location under they reach their final detention location.
- ICE [policy](#) requires ODLS systems to be updated within eight hours of release, removal, or transfer of detainees. ODLS also maintains records for noncitizens [held within 60 days](#) to the present in ICE custody.
- You can search either by Alien Number (A#) or by Biographical Information. To search by A#, you will need both the individual's A# and country of birth. To search by biographical information, you will need the client's first name, last name, and country of birth. You can also enter a date of birth to help narrow the search results.
- ODLS performs an exact-match search when using the biographic information search option. Ostensibly, this is to avoid over-sharing of a detained individual's information in a public website. However, this means that a search for "Robert Smith" will not return a detention record for "Robert Smyth" or "Bob Smith."
- In that case, follow up with the family and see if there are any other or more complete names of the person you are trying to locate. The same problem is encountered if there is an error made by ICE in entering any data in the system.

Locating Your Client Using ICE ERO Offices/Locating Your Client By Process of Elimination

If you have trouble locating your client using the ODLS, you may want to contact the local ICE ERO office with jurisdiction over the location of the arrest. ICE's website provides general contact information for each ICE ERO office, including a phone number and outreach email address for the public: www.ice.gov/contact/field-offices. There also may be no alternative other than simply calling each of the possible facilities where ICE may have taken your client or potential client.

What to Know

- Attorneys do not need to know a person's A# to secure a legal call at facilities because under official [ICE guidance](#), "the facility must make a good faith effort to identify the specific detainee if provided with other personal identifying information."
- ICE may not be willing to tell you where your particular potential client is being held but you can ask what facilities that ERO Field Office is typically using to help you narrow down your search.
- ICE maintains a directory (www.ice.gov/detention-facilities) with links to various ICE detention centers. Here you will find the ICE detention center address, how to contact your client, visiting hours for attorneys and family, how to send items to detainees, and other details. However, this directory does not include all facilities that detain individuals on behalf of ICE. You can compare what is listed there with the facility information found on the bi-weekly Detention Statistics Excel Spreadsheet that is posted here: <https://www.ice.gov/detain/detention-management>
- If you experience difficulties in contacting ICE ERO via their public channels, you may want to follow up with ICE's Community Relations Officers (CRO) using the contact information provided on their website: <https://www.ice.gov/contact/oce>.

- If the CRO is unresponsive, you can submit a request for assistance via the ERO Contact Form that is available here: <https://www.ice.gov/webform/ero-contact-form>
- Entering your Form G-28 Notice of Representation using ICE's [ERO E-File system](#) will not tell you where your client is located, but if you know your client's A#, it will confirm that your client is detained. This could be helpful if your client is unresponsive after an ICE check-in and you suspect they may have been detained.

Finding Your Client Using The Bureau of Prisons (BOP)

The Department of Justice's (DOJ) Bureau of Prisons (BOP), also maintains "[Criminal Alien Requirement](#)" [prisons exclusively for non-citizens](#) in federal criminal custody, often for immigration status-related criminal convictions, such as illegal re-entry.

What to Know

- A charge of criminal illegal re-entry is often made against noncitizens who recently crossed the southern border. If your client is not coming up in ODLS, they may be in criminal custody.
- BOP has a public-facing inmate locator here: <https://www.bop.gov/inmateloc/>
- VINE is a victim-notification network that allows members of the public to be alerted if there is a custody change or transfer of a criminal detainee. If your client was taken into custody by criminal authorities and you believe ICE will place a detainer on them, this site may help you keep track of your client pending transfer: <https://www.vinelink.com/#state-selection>.

Using AILA Local Chapters

For AILA attorneys, most local AILA Chapters maintain a current list of ICE/ERO Officers and contact information, as well as where ICE is currently holding detainees. You can access this information via [the chapter website](#). Most AILA Chapters also appoint a local AILA ICE Liaison who can assist if you are unable to find this information on their website. Contact information for AILA's Local ICE Liaisons can be found by using AILA's Group Directory, <http://www.aila.org/group-directory>.

Special Note About Detainees who are Minors

Under the [Homeland Security Act of 2002](#), unaccompanied migrant children apprehended by enforcement officials are held under the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). These are children who are under 18-years old. ORR carries out its custodial duties related to minors in your jurisdiction. In general, ORR maintains "a continuum of care for the children in

a [shelter facility](#), foster care or [group home](#) (which may be [therapeutic](#)), [staff-secure](#) or [secure care facility](#), a [residential treatment center](#), or special needs care facility.” See [ORR Fact Sheet on Unaccompanied Minors](#).

However, ICE will take into custody certain migrant children even if they are 18-years old. These are juveniles who are not unaccompanied children or part of a family unit and typically have had an encounter with the criminal justice system. ICE has historically detained [them in juvenile facilities](#) across the country but because they are under 18, they will not show up on ODLS.

[AILA’s ICE Liaison Committee](#) recommends that you reach out to a local AILA colleague who represents immigrant children in proceedings in your jurisdiction to know what is the local practice of ICE and ORR in handling these cases.

What to know:

- The term “unaccompanied minor” is [defined in the law](#) and does not include all non-citizen children. Attorneys attempting to locate a minor child who may be in ORR custody should call the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) [Parent Hotline](#) at 1-800-203-7001.
- There is a unit within ICE’s Enforcement and Removal Operations called the “[Juvenile and Family Residential Management Unit](#)” (JFRMU). Within this unit, there are assigned Field Office Juvenile Coordinators (FOJC). Attorneys should ask to speak with their juvenile client’s ERO office and their Juvenile Coordinator.

Quick Explainer About ICE Facilities

ICE has a variety of facilities governed by different types of contracts. Generally, there are five types of ICE detention facilities, including hotels and hospitals.

- [Dedicated and Non Dedicated Facility List](#)
- [Over-72-Hour ICE Detention Facilities](#)

Facility Type	Description
Service Processing Center	A facility owned by ICE and generally operated by contract detention staff.
Contract Detention Facility (CDF)	A facility that is owned and operated by a private entity and with which ICE contracts directly for immigration detention services.
U.S. Marshals Service Inter-Governmental Agreement (USMS IGA)	A facility owned by a state or political subdivision of a state. The U.S. Marshals Service contracts with the state or local government for the use of the facility’s detention services through an Intergovernmental Agreement. ICE uses beds at the facility as a rider on the USMS agreement.

Intergovernmental Service Agreement (IGSA)	A facility owned by a state or political subdivision of a state. ICE uses beds at this kind of facility pursuant to an Intergovernmental Service Agreement with the state or political subdivision of the state.
Dedicated Intergovernmental Services Agreement (DIGSA)	An IGSA facility of which ICE generally has exclusive use.