

US immigration

‘I want my vote back’: Trump-voting family stunned after Canadian mother detained over immigration status

Family of Cynthia Olivera reconsiders support for president after Ice detained her at green card interview



Many nonviolent undocumented migrants in the US have been detained by Ice during Trump’s second term. Photograph: Patrick T Fallon/AFP/Getty Images

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The family of a Canadian national who supported Donald Trump’s plans for mass deportations of immigrants say they are feeling betrayed after federal agents recently detained the woman in California while she interviewed for permanent US residency – and began working to expel her from the country.

“We feel totally blindsided,” Cynthia Olivera’s husband – US citizen and self-identified Trump voter Francisco Olivera – told the California news station KGTV. “I want my vote back.”

Cynthia Olivera, a 45-year-old mother of three US-born children, thus joined a growing list of examples contradicting the Trump administration’s claims that the immigration crackdown it has spearheaded since the president’s return to the Oval Office in January has prioritized targeting dangerous criminals.



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Being in the US without legal status is generally a civil infraction rather than a criminal violation. Nonetheless, despite its claim that the immigration crackdown is mainly meant to rid the US of violent criminals, the White House has maintained that anyone in the US who lacks legal status is a criminal subject to deportation

Olivera was unwittingly thrust under the weight of those policies after Trump spent his successful 2024 presidential campaign promising to pursue them, earning her husband’s vote along the way, according to what he told KGTV. She was just 10 when her parents

brought her to the US from Toronto without permission, she said to the station.

By 1999, when she was about 19, US immigration officials at the Buffalo border crossing had determined Olivera was living in the country without legal status and obtained an expedited order to deport her. But, after being deported, she was able to return to the US by driving to San Diego from Mexico within a few months.

“They didn’t ask me for my citizenship – they didn’t do nothing,” Olivera would later say to KGTV. “They just waved me in.”

She recounted spending the next 25 years working in Los Angeles, paying taxes and providing for her family. KGTV reported that its investigative team scoured California and federal court databases, but the unit found no criminal charges under Cynthia Oliver’s name.

In 2024, toward the end of his presidency, Joe Biden’s administration granted her a permit allowing her to work legally in the US. She had also been navigating the process to obtain legal permanent US residency – colloquially referred to as a green card – for years.

Nonetheless, instead of supporting the candidate Biden endorsed to succeed him, then vice-president Kamala Harris, Olivera’s husband supported Trump in November’s White House election. He told KGTV that Trump’s promises to deport criminals en masse appealed to both him and Cynthia. And, echoing other mixed immigration status families who have had members affected by Trump’s policies, the Oliveras did not believe she would be hurt by her lack of legal US residency.

They learned she would in fact be affected by her immigration status when she went for a green card interview in Chatsworth, California, on 13 June. She was detained there by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Ice) agents, according to a change.org petition pleading for compassion on behalf of Cynthia.

Olivera has since been transferred to an Ice detention center in El Paso, Texas, to await being deported.

Speaking to KGTV over a video call from the El Paso facility, Olivera suggested her treatment was undeserved.

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“The US is my country,” Olivera remarked to the station in an interview published on 3 July. “That’s where I met my husband. That’s where I went to high school, junior high, elementary [school]. That’s where I had my kids.”

But the Trump administration had little sympathy for Olivera, despite her husband’s support of the president, with a spokesperson saying in a statement that Cynthia was “an illegal alien from Canada”.

Olivera had been “previously deported and chose to ignore our law and again illegally entered the country”, said the spokesperson’s statement, as reported by Newsweek. The statement noted that re-entering the US without permission after being deported is a felony, and it said Olivera would remain in Ice’s custody “pending removal to Canada”.

Canada’s government commented to KGTV that it was aware of Olivera’s detention but could not intervene on her behalf because “every country or territory decides who can enter or exit through its borders”.

Francisco Olivera, for his part, summed up his and his wife’s disillusion by saying: “My wife ... up until [a couple of weeks] ago, was a strong believer in what was going to happen the next four years.”

Cynthia Olivera, meanwhile, said she has told officials she and her husband are willing to pay for her to fly to Canada, where she plans to stay in Mississauga with a cousin. Yet there had been no immediate indication when she may be able to travel to Canada.

As she fought back tears, Olivera said to KGTV: “The only crime I committed is to love this country and to work hard and to provide for my kids.”

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