

Making Courts a Safe Zone for Immigrants

By Ana Ramirez Zarate

ICE has terrorized immigrant communities by conducting raids in courthouses around the country. In doing so they have instilled fear in the community making the process of navigating court systems even more isolating than it already is. In California, where we have fought to limit the entanglement between ICE and local law enforcement, ICE has continued using courthouses as traps to continue its strategy of violating due process protections under the law. This strategy is evident from the [raids in Kern County from 2013-2019](#) to the 2014 [kidnapping of Edgar Arzate](#) by ICE on his way to court in Santa Ana.

It is important to keep courthouses safe as protected areas from immigration enforcement because not doing so deters community from attending important court hearings, which in turn can have deeper *implications*. Our advocacy and community efforts have worked to cut off ICE's reach at every turn by limiting local collaboration, developing rapid response networks, and building community resilience. Our communities have begun addressing the fear that ICE has instilled by accompanying community members to criminal and immigration court and immigration appointments. Just last month as we were preparing to accompany a community member to immigration court in LA, he mentioned he was fearful detained at court. The day before his court date, we sat down with an attorney, community organizers and volunteers to prepare in the event this took place. On the morning of the court hearing, as we were driving to Los Angeles, he shared he had not been able to sleep at night thinking about what was going to happen.

It is detrimental to the health and well-being of community members to be afraid every step of the process. We must bring attention to the issue and express the importance of protecting our community as they are navigating these processes.

Ana Ramirez Zarate is a Community Organizer with Resilience Orange County and leads participatory defense efforts through the OC Rapid Response Network. Ana's background in immigrant rights organizing has seen her lead efforts in Orange County to hold law enforcement accountable. She is currently finishing a master's degree in Public Policy program at the University of California Riverside. For more information on the impact of ICE raids in courthouses, you can download Ceres' latest report on the chilling effect of ICE raids in courthouses [here](#). For any questions, contact Mitzia Martinez at mmartinez@cerespolicyresearch.com.