

How President Donald Trump's immigration orders could affect Ohio

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Cleveland.com

COLUMBUS, Ohio - A month into President Donald Trump's first administration, an Ohio deputy stopped a Spanish-speaking family for speeding.

The father had a valid Maryland driver's license, but the deputy asked border patrol to check his immigration status anyway.

The parents were undocumented, according to an [I-213 form](#) filed with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Their children were U.S. citizens. Border patrol sent the parents to Seneca County Jail and the children to Ottawa County Child Protective Services.

Their story is one of thousands from U.S. Border Patrol Sandusky Bay Station apprehension logs obtained by the [American Immigration Council](#) in 2024. And it illustrates what might come next.

Trump began his second term with sweeping executive actions to deter immigrants from entering the U.S. and remove those already here. State and local officials who don't cooperate with Trump's deportation plans could [face investigation and prosecution](#) by the Justice Department.

"We think the Ohio case study provides a blueprint," AIC's deputy legal director Raul Pinto said, for how interior enforcement will operate during Trump's second term. "They're going to establish this dragnet for feeding people from traffic stops to potential removals from the country."

Congress could stop the practice, or pass laws better defining the role of state and local agencies. But experts from all sides say that's unlikely in the near future.

"We're likely to see states and localities pushing the envelope" Bipartisan Policy Center's senior immigration advisor Theresa Cardinal Brown said; Toward expedited deportation and refusal to work with immigration officers.

Cleveland.com/The Plain Dealer wanted to understand how Ohio might approach this ambiguity and the impact on all foreign-born Ohioans.

What executive orders did Trump sign?

Trump started his second term with [six executive orders](#) about immigration.

Describing them as a “revolution of common sense,” Trump:

- Declared a national emergency at the southern border
- Indefinitely closed the southern border as a port of entry
- Paused refugee resettlement
- Revoked birthright citizenship for certain children
- Mandated asylum seekers remain in Mexico while their claims are processed.
- Designated drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations

“It’s an end to what the Biden Administration has done,” said Eric Ruark, [research director for Numbers USA](#), a conservative nonprofit that argues for limited immigration.

Ruark supports Trump’s changes, but he dislikes policy whiplash every time a new administration takes office.

“Congress is guilty here,” Ruark said. They have “the ultimate authority over immigration.”

How Trump’s orders [hold up in court](#) remains to be seen. A federal judge [temporarily blocked](#) his order revoking birthright citizenship on Thursday.

How many immigrants live in Ohio?

About 624,000 Ohio residents are foreign-born, according to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#). That’s 5.3% of Ohio’s population.

Slightly more than half are naturalized U.S citizens, while the other half are not.

The most common country they come from is India, followed by Mexico, China, the Philippines and Canada.

Ohio also has about 31,000 foreign students at colleges and universities.

It's [harder to estimate](#) how many people have Temporary Protected Status or TPS. The program that made national headlines after Trump and Vice President JD Vance falsely claimed Haitians living in Springfield were eating neighbors' pets.

Springfield officials think they have somewhere between 12,000 and 15,000 Haitian residents.

As for unauthorized immigrants, the U.S. Census Bureau doesn't publish estimates, but the American Immigration Council estimates about 20% of Ohio's immigrants are undocumented.

They get the estimate by combing through "microdata" in the Census' American Community Survey.

What will happen to asylum seekers?

Asylum seekers are similar to refugees in the sense that both need credible claims of persecution or potential persecution by their home country in one of these categories:

- Race
- Religion
- Nationality
- Social group
- Political opinion

Asylees present themselves at a "port of entry," hoping to make their case while living in America; while refugees go through the vetting process abroad.

Biden's administration let asylum seekers who passed an initial interview wait inside the U.S., contributing to a record 3.7 million pending immigration court cases -- a policy Trump's executive order ended.

"What is really needed to deal with the inflow of illegal immigration is detention space and immigration judges who can clear the backlog," Ruark said.

The Cleveland Immigration Court has 13 judges and 16,740 pending asylum cases as of November 2024, according to Syracuse University's now defunct [Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse](#).

These cases represent immigrants who told ICE they planned to reside in Ohio and undocumented people caught living here.

"Nothing in these executive orders indicates they are going to move these cases more efficiently," said Christopher Levesque, a professor of law and sociology at Kenyon College.

His research puts the average wait time for a final decision at four years. In April of 2022, he estimated the wait at [2.2 years](#).

"Even if you increase the number of judges, that doesn't make the system more efficient," Levesque said. "I think the hope is enough people will be in detention and decide to self-deport."

That's something Levesque has his eye on: How states respond to Trump's push for more detention centers.

"Is that going to be concentrated mostly in Republican states or Republican localities that want to see more funding and resources from the federal government to purchase more beds for their local jails?" Levesque asked.

The majority of people seeking asylum through Cleveland's court are denied, according to TRAC records.

"Here's what I would like people to understand," said Ruark, an immigration critic. "Most people who come over aren't claiming asylum or credible fear. This is about economic migrants. They are coming because jobs are on offer to them."

To stop illegal immigration, Numbers USA believes Trump must crack down on employers who hire them.

What about Ohio's refugees?

Trump also signed an executive order [suspending the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program](#) until "further entry into the United States of refugees aligns with the interests of the United States."

That means the 36 people the Community Refugee & Immigration Services of Ohio planned to resettle next month won't be coming.

Local groups like CRIS work with federal officials to place refugees in cities across the country. These immigrants spend years abroad being vetted through fingerprinting, background checks, interviews with the FBI and even a biometric screening.

Refugee resettlement comes with housing, job training, English lessons and other perks funded by federal, state and local governments, along with private donations.

It is not the program that brought Haitian immigrants to Springfield.

"I got a call from Vance's office asking who resettled the Haitians in Springfield, and I said no one resettled them," CRIS executive director Angie Plummer said. "We resettled one Haitian through the resettlement program, but it gets conflated."

CRIS welcomed an Ethiopian woman with cerebral palsy to central Ohio earlier this month.

"She came but her brother didn't," CRIS Executive Director Angie Plummer said. "We got her quicker because she had medical issues."

Plummer accompanied their mother to the airport to meet the daughter and said the reunion was a mixture of joy and grief.

"She was despondent that her son, who is a young adult, was stuck with no prospect of getting here before this executive order happened," Plummer said. "Can you imagine?"

Refugees living in Ohio worry Trump's order [ending birthright citizenship](#) could apply to their children. "It talks about not granting birthright citizenship where the mother is unlawfully here or has some kind of temporary status," Plummer said.

Trump's order lists some temporary statuses like student or travel visas, but it also says "such as, but not limited to."

"It just creates uncertainties," Plummer said. "Before reading the order I thought no one would be questioning a child born of a refugee because they are here lawfully but this language makes me think there is a gray area."

Twenty-two states have challenged the order on birthright citizenship, saying it's guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution.

What happens to the Haitians in Springfield?

Haitians living in Springfield made national headlines last year when Trump and Vice President JD Vance falsely claimed they were eating people's pets.

Most Haitians living in Ohio came here through temporary protected status --a program for people in countries labeled unsafe because of an armed conflict or natural disaster.

Trump's initial executive orders didn't touch on temporary protected status, but Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost wants it changed.

"This program has been applied too loosely, allowing noncitizens to live here indefinitely, even after it's safe for them to return home," Yost said in a statement. "Congress made these designations temporary for a reason – they were never supposed to last 20-plus years."

Biden extended Haitian TPS protections for 18 months in June. Six months later, he did the same for for nearly 1 million immigrants from other countries.

Trump's administration could try to rescind or not renew Biden's executive orders, but Cardinal Brown of the Bipartisan Policy Center said he'll need a reason.

"He tried to not renew it for several countries (in his first term) and that was overturned in court," Cardinal Brown said. "The statute sets out criteria that have to be looked at. The court said, 'you didn't look at all these appropriately.'"

What about work visas?

The question of whether to allow immigrants on work visas to remain in the U.S. has divided conservative Republicans from the tech investors in Trump's inner circle.

Both Elon Musk and Ohio's own Vivek Ramaswamy have defended the H-1B visa program for skilled workers.

"Of course my companies and I would prefer to hire Americans and we do, as that is much easier than going through the incredibly painful and slow work visa process," Musk posted on X in December. "However, there is a dire shortage of extremely talented and motivated engineers in America."

Steve Bannon, a longtime Trump confidante, called these visas a “scam” that hurts Americans and suggested deporting all H-1B visa holders.

None of Trump’s executive orders mentioned work visas.

In December, Trump called himself a “believer in H-1B.” He also appointed Indian-American venture capitalist Sriram Krishnan as senior policy adviser on artificial intelligence.

Krishnan came in the US in 2007 on a work visa for Microsoft. He became a citizen in 2016.

How much latitude will states have?

States such as Texas have gone their own way on immigration for years, Cardinal Brown said -- a trend she expects to continue under the second Trump administration.

“The cracks are not just showing. They’re becoming chasms in our system,” Cardinal Brown added. “We are relying on the courts to tell us what our immigration policy should be.”

Ohio Republicans introduced a number of immigration bills that didn’t pass during the last general assembly.

They tried to make certain employers [verify the immigration status](#) of their workers through the federal E-Verify program.

Rep. Josh Williams, a Republican from the Toledo area, introduced legislation to ban “sanctuary cities.” He [plans to bring it back](#) this year.

Coordination between border patrol and certain police departments in Ohio could also resume or ramp up.

“It’s one thing to have a collaboration between agencies,” Pinto said. “It’s another to have border patrol dictating local law enforcement policies.”

His organization’s report on Sandusky’s station found that almost 89% of those arrested fit this very particular profile of darker-skin Latino males aged 18-55.

And the justifications for immigration inquiries were “all over the place.”

Official reports cited avoiding eye contact; appearing rigid, too nervous or too calm; driving too slowly or speaking Spanish.

“They really have this stereotype of who they should be going after,” Pinto said. “It raises legal and ethical questions... about equal protection under the law and using someone’s appearance as a basis for detention.”

The Spanish-speaking father from Mexico had a valid driver’s license but OSHP still called for an immigration check.

The parents were undocumented, but the American Immigration Council found U.S. nationals made up 23% of apprehensions.

“If you use the Sandusky report, ask yourself which communities are going to be more vulnerable,” Pinto said. “Communities of color, and that is very concerning.”