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JUDGE BLOCKS DEPORTATION OF MORE THAN 1,400 IRAQI IMMIGRANTS

Detained individuals had criminal records

By Kris Maher
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A federal judge in Detroit temporarily blocked the deportation of more than 1,400 Iraqi immigrants with criminal records who were [detained by federal immigration agents last month](#).

U.S. District Judge Mark Goldsmith granted a preliminary injunction sought by attorneys for a group of Iraqis until they can make their case in immigration courts that their deportation would be illegal.

Lawyers for the immigrants, many of whom are Christians, have argued that their return to Iraq would subject them to persecution, torture and possible death. Attorneys for the federal government had argued that the district court had no jurisdiction in the case.

In a 35-page ruling issued late Monday, Judge Goldsmith said the court's involvement was warranted by the "extraordinary circumstances" of the case, including that more than 1,400 people suddenly learned they were to be deported. Many of those people had been sent to facilities across the country, complicating their legal defense, the judge added.

"Petitioners' claims are far from speculative," Judge Goldsmith wrote in his opinion. "Each Petitioner faces the risk of torture or death on the basis of residence in America and publicized criminal records; many will also face persecution as a result of a particular religious affiliation."

The ACLU of Michigan, which sought the temporary injunction, applauded the ruling. "We're heartened that the court has once again recognized our country's commitment to fundamental fairness," said Miriam Aukerman, a senior staff attorney with the group.

Khaalid Walls, a spokesman for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said Tuesday the agency would have a comment on the judge's ruling later in the day. The agency had previously said that Iraq recently agreed to accept Iraqi nationals who had been subject to removal orders.

All of the individuals detained recently had past criminal convictions, including serious offenses such as homicide and aggravated assault and robbery, and a federal immigration judge had previously ordered them to be removed, the agency said.

The arrests in June of Iraqi nationals, including many in the Detroit area, were part of an ICE sweep focused on undocumented members of the community of Iraqi Christians, known as Chaldeans, with past criminal convictions. Attorneys and family members have said many individuals had since built families and become productive members of the community.

The roundup sparked outrage in the Iraqi Christian community beyond Detroit, the largest concentration of Chaldeans in the nation. It became the latest flashpoint in the Trump administration's stepped up [efforts to deport people with criminal records](#).