

Testimony Against County Commissioners Approving Local Jail Contracts with ICE September 2025

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Nola Lowther and I am a resident of Medina, Ohio. I am here to urge the county commissioners to refuse to enter into any contracts with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to detain immigrants in our local jail. On May 27, 2025, I gave testimony urging that contracts are not made between ICE and Medina County to house people arrested by ICE in our jail. Since then, the situation has changed, requiring me to update my plea to not comply with ICE requests.

First, The Cleveland Plain Dealer, on August 27, 2025, reported that the Ohio attorney general, Dave Yost, authorized that only county commissioners can sign contracts with ICE to indefinitely detain people facing civil immigration charges. The detainee may be incarcerated for months or longer, until a judge rules on the case. The contract would specify whether or not detainees could be transported to court hearings or medical visits.

Second, in recent months we have witnessed via the media horrific actions of masked, unidentified ICE enforcers violently detaining people of color in workplaces, neighborhoods, and public spaces. Many of these people are detained without a warrant or due process. Some have been found to be US citizens and from January to June of this year, 60-70% of those detained by ICE had no criminal record at all. Immigrants have been removed from families and their many civic contributions because they “appear foreign.” For civil—not criminal detention—immigrants are locked down in jails and prisons that are overcrowded, lack adequate medical care, and have no accommodations for vulnerable populations as such as those with disabilities or LGBTQ community members. Moreover, many facilities housing ICE detainees provide inadequate food and sanitation. 70% of the 60,000 people detained per day are placed in private facilities. Private facilities are defined as non-government facilities or non-federal or local facilities. Medina County Jail would potentially be a private facility. The federal government reimburses non-government and non-federal facilities for housing detainees that have not been charged with a crime. These facilities are reimbursed for housing detainees indefinitely with little to no oversight of their conditions. These facilities are incentivized by our tax dollars to keep non-criminals locked up indefinitely, often without due process, and without communication from the outside world. In other words, when non-criminal detainees are afforded due process and communication, they can be freed and the facility will lose money. Detaining and deporting immigrants without due process is unconstitutional.

The current treatment of immigrants is abhorrent because the system is cruel, degrading and arbitrary. Criminals without proper citizen documentation should be deported with adequate due process. Most of the detainees are not criminals. The new system outlined by AG Yost is meant for civil detainees. They are not criminals. These are human beings caught in the morass of a terrible immigration policy, administered by a government that prizes cruelty and fear over compassion and common sense. Their main “offense” is seeking a better life.

What local government wants to be complicit in a cruel authoritarian venture to make a few bucks on empty jail cells? What local government wants to be complicit with ICE if individuals are detained without proper judicial warrants or due process? What local government wants to treat civil detainees as criminals? What local governing principle would the contract with ICE serve? What influence does tearing immigrants from their family, job and community have on crime control in Medina County? Our jails are for local justice not federal cruelty or financial gain. Participation makes us complicit in inhumane federal policies.

The Medina County where I grew up and returned to over 20 years ago believes in justice, family unity, human dignity and responsible government. Agreeing to a jail contract with ICE fulfills none of these features. Commissioners, you must reject ICE detention contracts. A resolution for the commissioners to oppose entering into contracts housing immigrants arrested by ICE is attached.

Dr. Nola Lowther, September 9, 2025