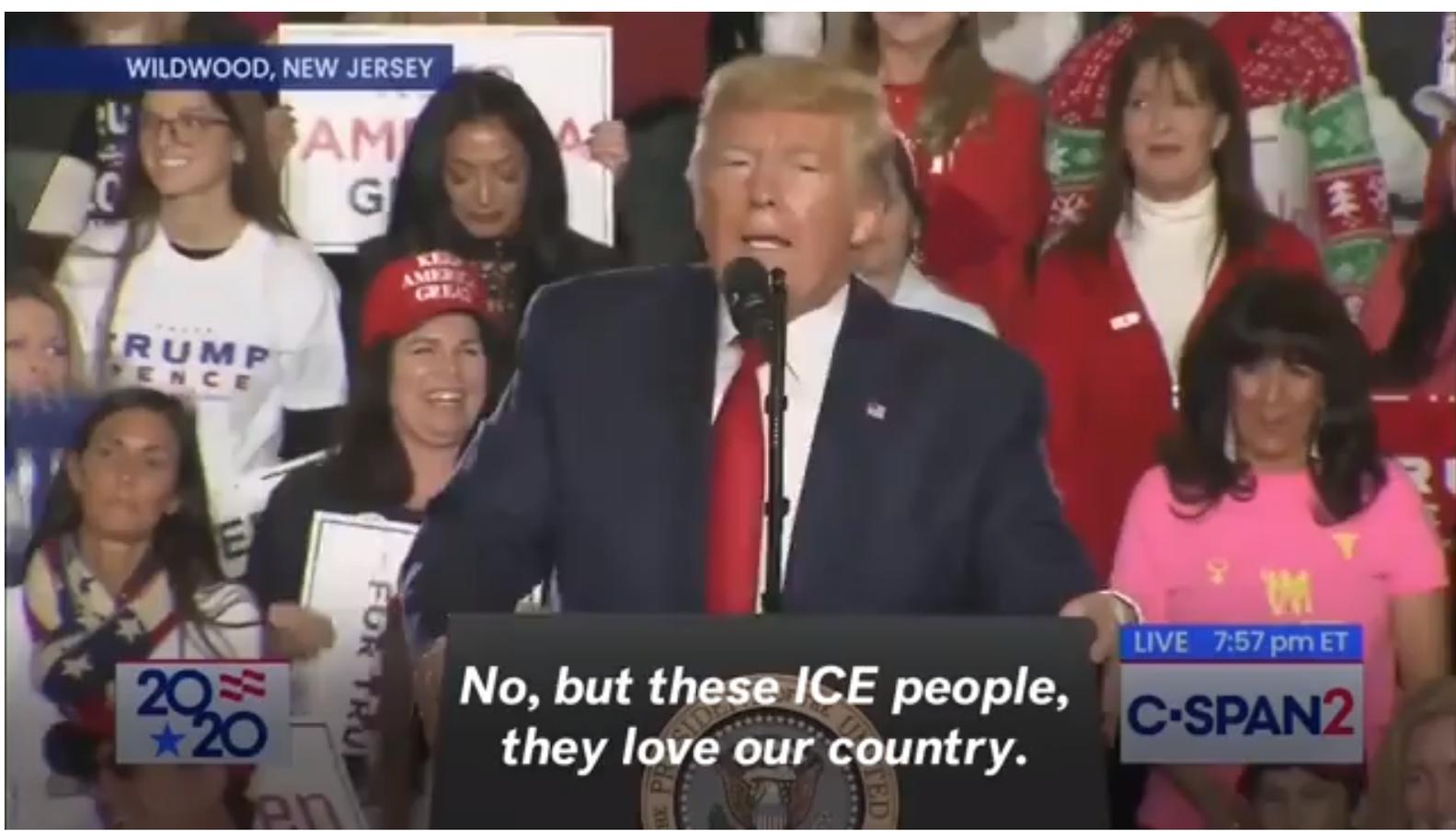


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U.S.

ICE Offering 'Citizens Academy' Course with Training on Arresting Immigrants

BY **CHANTAL DA SILVA** ON 7/9/20 AT 1:13 PM EDT



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U.S. IMMIGRATION ICE

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency is set to launch a six-week "Citizens Academy" course on immigration enforcement, which will include training for citizens on how to arrest undocumented immigrants.

A letter published online by The St. Louis Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America (IFCLA) appears to show ICE Chicago Field Office Director Robert Guadian inviting shareholders to participate in the course, which includes six days of training over a six-week period starting in September.

"You have been identified as a valued member of the community who may have interest in participating in the inaugural class of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) Chicago Citizens Academy," the letter states.

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Noting that the program is "the first of its kind," Guadian states that the program will "serve as a pilot for nationwide implementation."

During the training, stakeholders would receive training on a number of "facets and responsibilities of ICE/ERO operations," he says.

Included in the course would be training in "defensive tactics, firearms familiarization and targeted arrests."

The training would be "scenario-based," he states, adding that exercises would be "conducted in a safe and positive environment."

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Yes

No

I'm not sure, it depends

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In a statement sent to *Newsweek*, ICE spokesperson Nicole Alberico said the academy was "an extension of the community relations work ICE is already doing in the community."

"The goal is to build bridges with the community by offering a day-in-the-life perspective of a federal law enforcement agency," she said.

Alberico said the programming was modeled after other academies including those run by the Homeland Security Investigations unit, as well as by the FBI and local police departments "all with the goal of directly engaging and educating the public."

In an official statement on the program, ICE further said: "The Citizen's Academy is an opportunity for the community to get a transparent, insider's view of ICE's immigration enforcement operations."

"ICE is inviting interested participants from a variety of stakeholder backgrounds including: Community groups, state/local elected leaders, Congressional staff, consular officials and business and religious leaders," the agency said.

While Guadian's letter did not mention these aspects of the academy's curriculum, the ICE statement said it would "include, but is not limited to, classroom instruction, visiting an immigration detention center, learning more about the health care ICE provides to those in its custody, and examining ICE's role in an immigration case from start to finish."

"Conversely, the Citizen's Academy affords ICE the opportunity to hear from participants and learn from their perspectives," it added.

Asked why Guadian's letter on the program and ICE's statement appeared to highlight vastly different parts of the curriculum, Alberico maintained that "ICE is not training anyone to do immigration enforcement."

"Like other law enforcement agencies' academies, there's often a unit in self-defense and de-escalation," Alberico said.

"All federally-trained law enforcement officers go through such training and the Academy wants to show the community what this training looks like.

"Additionally, ICE wants to show the humanitarian efforts and due process that is behind every targeted immigration arrest."

In a separate statement provided by ICE, Guadian said: "The Academy is a natural progression from the outreach work we have already been doing with our community."

"Our community meetings are only a few hours long but this is a six-week opportunity for the community to get to know our officers and understand our mission," he said.

Speaking with *Newsweek* on Thursday, however, Chicago Congressman Jesús 'Chuy' García said he was disturbed by the program, which he fears will lead to racial profiling, surveillance and potential violence.

The "Citizens Academy" was first brought to García's attention when his wife spotted a social media post about it.

"The first thing I thought was, 'is this a prank or fake news or what is this?' because it's appearing on social media and neither I or any of my staff had been alerted or reached out to by ICE," he said.

As a member of Congress, García had thought a program like this would have been brought to lawmakers' attention prior to its rollout, but it never was.

"I should not be learning about this on social media and I resent that," he said.

The six-week course, García said, appeared to be "inviting people to become an extension of ICE... to possibly surveil their neighbors who might be undocumented."

He also feared that the invitation might appeal to "right-wing individuals who might like the vigilante lifestyle," which could lead to potential violence.

"Absolutely. When you incite people with hateful and intolerant rhetoric for four years and you ratchet things up, especially if the polls show you're behind or struggling you can become reckless and that's my fear," he said, appearing to refer to President Donald Trump's current struggle in the polls.

People who share in the president's "beliefs about immigration," he said, could be drawn to the program and feel that they are being given a license to profile, surveil and potentially attack community members.

Encouraging potential profiling of community members, he added, flies in the face of widespread calls for systemic racism to be addressed in the wake of George Floyd's killing.

In a statement shared with *Newsweek*, Sara John, the executive director of the IFCLA, agreed: "We are outraged at the launch of yet another immoral initiative used by ICE to criminalize and destroy our families.

"The Citizens Academy program will train citizens to perpetuate race-based violence and further normalizes hate crimes that already devastate our neighborhoods.

"Our tax dollars should not be spent on this hatred. Especially not when a global pandemic continues to wreak havoc on our communities.

"This blatant endorsement of white supremacy coded in a false display of patriotism seeks to excuse racial profiling and will only lead to increased violence, hatred and xenophobia in our communities."

Alberico told *Newsweek* that ICE's stance is that "the misunderstanding, anger and confusion of what the agency does on a daily basis is exactly why the Academy is needed."

According to Guadian's letter, the training would be held every Tuesday from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. at ICE's Chicago Field Office starting on September 15. The training sessions would culminate on October 20.

Following completion of the training session, a graduation ceremony is expected to be held on Friday, October 23, with graduates being awarded a certificate and a commemorative coin.

The course can also be used to obtain Continuing Education Credits (CEUs), which ICE said would be available upon request.

Noting that the U.S. is currently in the middle of a pandemic, Guadian said in his letter that participants would be issued Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and that social distancing guidelines would be adhered to.

This article has been updated with statements from ICE and from the IFCLA.