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D.C. operators report increased ICE visits; two restaurants in Nashville temporarily closed amid immigration enforcement fears



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3 Min Read



Over the past couple of weeks, restaurant operators in cities across the U.S. have reported upticks in immigration enforcement incidents. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers have maintained a robust presence particularly in Washington, D.C. and Nashville, where fears of mass restaurant staff arrests have grown.

In the nation's capital, the Department of Homeland Security has reportedly visited more than 100 businesses in the D.C. area to conduct "worksite enforcement operations," which includes I-9 documentation inspections to determine the legal status of employees. [According to NBC News](#), at least nine restaurants received visits by immigration authorities last week, with at least two restaurant operators declining to cooperate with authorities because they did not have a warrant.

"It kind of rattled the team at the restaurants a little bit. It's always unnerving when anyone shows up at a location with any type of uniform," Natasha Neely, vice president of Pupatella in Dupont Circle, told NBC News.

The incidents have prompted a response from the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington, which confirmed that no arrests were made during these visits.

"To ensure we are doing everything possible to support our members, RAMW sent a formal letter today to the Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Office of the Special Agent in Charge," RAMW president and CEO Shawn Townsend said in a statement. "In the letter, we

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The restaurant association also suggested that operators review and verify all I-9 forms, ensure they are stored properly, and to attend I-9 training sessions to better understand how to properly and legally respond to visits from immigration authorities.

In Nashville, increases in ICE activity have created operational challenges for restaurants. Over the past couple of weeks, hundreds of people were stopped on the road in Nashville by ICE authorities, leading to at least 96 detainments, according to [local news station, WSMV](#).

Restaurant operators noted a downturn in business as fears of ICE detainments begin to affect both employees and customers. Two restaurants on the iconic Broadway strip in Nashville told local Fox News syndicate, WZTV, that they had to shut down operations because employees have fled.

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"It's just creating this general sense of fear all the time," one restaurant manager, who wished to remain anonymous, told WZTV. "There were rumors flying around about ICE being on Lower Broadway. "It was credible enough that we had to close the restaurant because back-of-house staff had to leave. Everyone split."

The Nashville Area Hispanic Chamber of Commerce [has released](#) I-9 compliance training as the number of immigration arrests both nationally and in the city have grown.

In response to the increase in immigration-related detainments, Nashville Mayor Freddie O'Connell [issued an executive order](#), requiring that communication between federal immigration authorities and Washington Metro department or employees be reported to the mayor's office within one day.

The Trump administration has set a goal of deporting at least [one million immigrants annually](#), which is almost quadruple [the previous record](#) in 2019 during Trump's last presidential administration.

About the Author

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Joanna Fantozzi is a Senior Editor for Nation’s Restaurant News and Restaurant Hospitality. She has more than seven years of experience writing about the restaurant and hospitality industry. Her editorial coverage ranges from profiles of independent restaurants around the country to breaking...

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