

MESSAGING GUIDANCE DURING A FEDERAL OCCUPATION

In 2025, American cities are facing an unprecedented threat from the Trump administration and allied state governments. Deployments of federal troops have been used to suppress protests and terrorize local communities. These deployments consist of (1) the presence or threatened presence of US military forces like the National Guard; (2) masked secret police (ICE or other federal law enforcement) conducting aggressive immigration enforcement; and (3) a deliberate and targeted misinformation campaign about crime and on-the-ground conditions in targeted cities (Portland, Chicago, D.C., LA, Memphis, and more). These actions are intended to force a racist, anti-immigrant agenda on any community that dares to resist.

As a local elected official, your voice is critical in this moment to reveal what's happening, push back against false narratives, and support your community. With the federal administration threatening future deployments, this document is designed to guide you on immediate steps to take if the military or federal agents are sent to your area, and on how to talk about it.

YOUR IMMEDIATE FIRST STEPS

Coordinate with allied elected officials on the state, federal, and local levels.

Aligning with your partners and allies ASAP is essential to immediately framing the deployment as unwelcome and unproductive. Focus your time first on touching base with allied elected officials, rather than trying to convince those who might not be aligned.

Collaborate with movement partners and immigrant rights organizations.

In addition to coordinating with other officials, quickly contacting grassroots and movement organizations is key to building strong resistance. These groups are providing direct services and organizing directly impacted communities so they can provide you and your allied officials with capacity as you navigate how to respond to a new deployment. If your locality engages in ICE watch activities, get connected with them ASAP.

Have your state or locality pursue litigation against the deployment.

Key to fighting back will be a legal strategy to challenge the legal justification for the new deployment. Engaging with your city attorney and state attorney general, and reviewing court filings and transcripts, will help keep your community informed about ongoing efforts to remove federal troops from your locality. This will also be a key part of an ongoing communications strategy.

MESSAGING TOPLINES

The Trump administration is waging war on our communities under the guise of safety.

Communities across the country want real solutions to public safety, not a show of force. National Guard troops stationed on every corner do little to keep our communities safe, and in reality, provide cover for ICE to terrorize those very corners in the dead of night. Use your platform to share the stories of those who are the targets of this aggravated enforcement to show Trump's plans are to wage war against our communities, not keep us safe. As has been done in Chicago and Portland, document ICE's actions yourself, and when possible, use specific examples of ICE's excessive force (like when [ICE agents arrested Alderperson Jessie Fuentes](#) in a hospital) to demonstrate their brutality.

These federal troop deployments and escalated ICE enforcement are a waste of resources, especially at a time when the federal government is slashing budgets.

Since the start of 2025, this administration has cut billions in critical funding for health care and food assistance to pour unprecedented funding into [ICE](#) and national guard deployments. If a deployment has occurred in your locality, it's essential to come with facts and figures on how much it costs to contrast with the funding cuts in your locality. It's important to highlight how city services, under threat from federal budget cuts, could improve the quality of life and/or public safety more effectively without the wasteful deployment of federal troops.

Humanize those being targeted by ICE and DHS.

Across the country, we've seen masked agents use violent scare tactics to disappear our neighbors, all under the guise of "public safety." The Trump Administration is doing everything in its power to diminish the human impact of these stories and focus on law and order. We must quickly elevate the human impact to create a stark contrast between families being torn apart and ICE criminalizing our neighbors. Speak with your local grassroots organizations and find the stories of those taken into ICE custody. Use your time on radio and TV to tell those stories and turn those numbers into real human narratives.

In the immediate aftermath of a deployment, it is critical to take every available media opportunity to share these topline talking points and related messaging. The Trump administration has regularly "flooded the zone" by pushing its narrative at every opportunity across social media, national news outlets, and any other communication channel. It is imperative for you to not only show up in person to support your community but also be present on the airwaves to push back against their destructive narratives.

Other resources:

- [Messaging & Narrative Guide: Protecting Immigrant Rights Under a Hostile Federal Administration](#)
- [Protecting First Amendment Rights Under a Hostile Federal Administration](#)