

New Deportation Policy Could Put Thousands Of Utah Immigrants At Risk For Speedy Removals

KUER

July 25, 2019

Rocio Hernandez

<https://www.kuer.org/post/new-deportation-policy-could-put-thousands-utah-immigrants-risk-speedy-removals#stream/0>

Immigration judges at the West Valley City immigration court have issued 1,382 removal orders this year, more than double the removal order it issued in 2017, according to data from Syracuse University's TRAC research center. The Department of Homeland Security may now fast-track deportations of certain immigrants in the country illegally, regardless of where immigration officers encounter them.

The change eliminates geographic restrictions to so-called expedited removal, which previously could only be applied to certain undocumented immigrants caught within 100 miles of the border or arriving by sea.

The policy shift is the latest effort by the Trump administration to crack down on illegal immigration, putting potentially thousands of undocumented immigrants living in Utah at risk of deportation if they cannot prove that they have lived in the country continuously for a two-year period.

The process could be so fast that undocumented immigrants would not have the chance to plead their case in an immigration court, according to the American Immigration Council, a pro-immigrant advocacy group which — along with the American Civil Liberties Union — has said it will sue to block the policy.

"So it's essentially a way to circumvent the immigration court and the way the government sees it, save themselves money, save themselves bed space and judicial resources," said Carlos Navarro, a Salt Lake City immigration attorney.

KUER sent requests for comment to federal agencies and Utah's congressional delegation and they either declined to comment or did not respond.

Last month, U.S. immigration courts faced a backlog of 909,034 pending cases, according to a notice by the Department of Homeland Security on the policy change.

The new policy also expands the time frame in which expedited removal can be used to remove immigrants found to be in the country illegally. Previously, immigrants whom immigration officials encounter within 100 miles of the U.S. border and had been in the country for less than 14 days could be deported through the process. For those arriving by sea, the timeframe was less than two years.

"The new designation adds one more tool for DHS — utilizing specific authority from Congress — to confront the ongoing security and humanitarian crisis on the Southwest border and throughout the country," acting Homeland Security Secretary Kevin McAleenan said in a statement issued Tuesday. "We are past the breaking point and must take all appropriate action to enforce the law, along the U.S. borders and within the country's interior. This designation makes it clear that if you have no legal right to be here, we will remove you."

Expedited removals are typically seen in states like California, Arizona and Texas, Navarro said. There are an estimated 110,000 undocumented immigrants living in Utah, a 10,000 increase from 2007, according to a June report by the Pew Research Center.

But Navarro doesn't think the new policy will add significant stress to lives of Utah immigrants.

"I don't think it's possible for them to try to hide any more than they are already hiding or try to avoid committing any more crimes than they already are," Navarro said. "Anybody who married a citizen within that two-year span or has a green card application pending, I guess those would be the most effective, but other than that it's not a huge practical difference for most people."

Immigration judges at the West Valley City immigration court have issued 1,382 removal orders this year, more than double the removal order it issued in 2017, according to data from Syracuse University's TRAC research center.