

# THE HANDBOOK FOR CONSTITUTIONAL OBSERVERS

COPAL & IMMIGRANT DEFENSE NETWORK



ART BY



## Foreword

Publishing *The Handbook for Constitutional Observers* (henceforth referred to as “*The Handbook*”) in such dark times is a leap of faith. It reflects our collective belief that, by standing together, we reclaim our humanity in the face of a system that dehumanizes those deemed disposable: people whose only “crime” is to cross borders in search of sustenance, dignity, and life.

In moments like this, we do not act for recognition—we act out of duty. And yet, we warmly honor your courage and your willingness to stand in solidarity. Thank you for your commitment to become a Constitutional Observer. Together, we will continue to defend immigrant rights and the Constitutional Rights of every person on U.S. soil.

We welcome the use of *The Handbook* by anyone committed to justice. To honor the labor of those who created it, please cite COPAL, a member organization of the Immigrant Defense Network: [www.copalmn.org](http://www.copalmn.org). This work belongs to our cultural heritage in times of resistance.

En Solidaridad,  
Equipo COPAL.



## Disclaimers

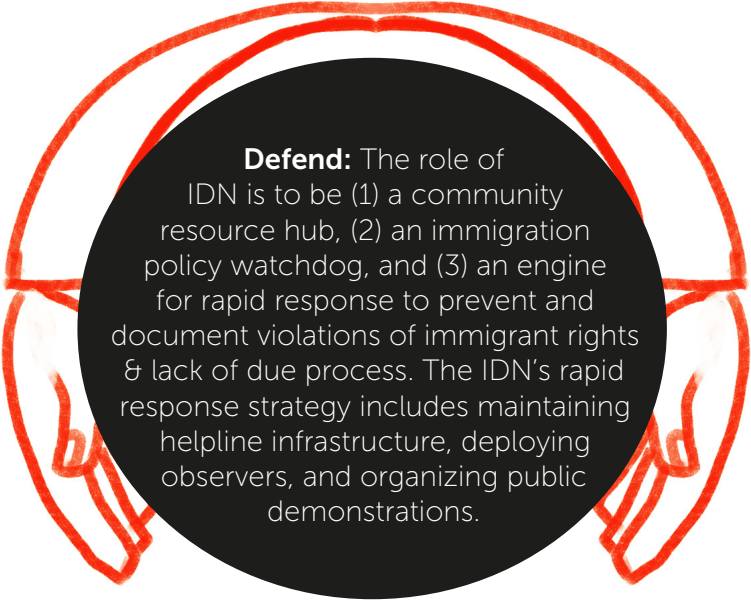
1. *The Handbook* is for **educational purposes only**.
2. The authors of this resource are **not your lawyers**.
3. We are in an evolving legal landscape.

# Welcome to the Immigrant Defense Network!


The Immigrant Defense Network (IDN) – a growing, Minnesota-based coalition of 90+ nonprofits, grassroots groups, and advocates – is developing new rapid response and movement building strategies through deep collaboration and coordination.

To build a powerful network, the IDN utilizes a two-pronged “Defend & Drive” framework focused on both community defense and proactive change.





**Defend:** The role of IDN is to be (1) a community resource hub, (2) an immigration policy watchdog, and (3) an engine for rapid response to prevent and document violations of immigrant rights & lack of due process. The IDN's rapid response strategy includes maintaining helpline infrastructure, deploying observers, and organizing public demonstrations.



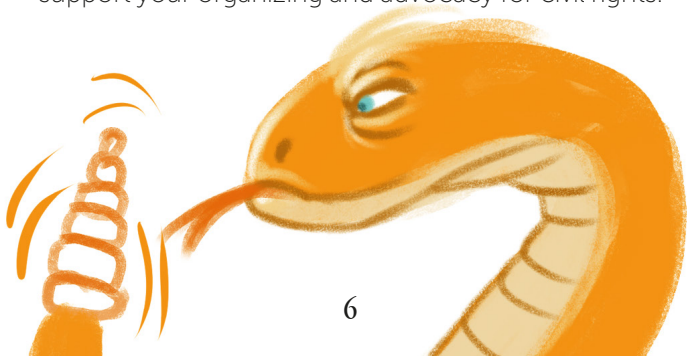
**Drive:** (1) The role of IDN is to shape public narratives and conversations about immigrants and (2) mobilize a diverse network of over 90+ organizations towards transforming systems, with the goal of improving the quality of life and dignity of immigrants.

## Why Now?: The Campaign of Fear

As of the time of writing *The Handbook*, the current presidential administration is waging a campaign of fear, villainizing immigrants across the country. The “Big Ugly Bill,” signed into law in July of 2025, invests \$170 billion in immigration enforcement and detention. Among other atrocities, the bill removes 1.3 million documented immigrants off healthcare.

Meanwhile, the administration is making threats that will have an even wider reaching impact. There are increasing cases of U.S. citizens being arrested by ICE, students have been detained for political speech, and top officials have made multiple threats to suspend habeas corpus.

In this difficult moment, *The Handbook* is a tool to support your organizing and advocacy for civil rights.





# The Role of a Constitutional Observer

Constitutional Observers are trained practitioners of “civil initiative” who:

1. Observe and document law enforcement interactions.
2. Inform individuals about civil rights and due process.
3. Share support resources.

## What is Civil Initiative?

Civil initiative, practiced by Constitutional Observers, is a way of engaging in direct action that uplifts civil rights and due process. Contrasted with “civil disobedience,” civil initiative isn’t about intentionally breaking the law. Conversely, it demands that we draw a line in the sand and prevent the further erosion of our rights under the U.S. Constitution.





# #1 Observe & Document

To observe and document as a Constitutional Observer, follow these protocols:

- Wear your Constitutional Observer badge.
- Identify yourself verbally as a Constitutional Observer.
- Stay at a safe distance (8 ft.) and avoid ANY physical contact.
- Record events with photos/videos.
- Ask questions to ICE and witnesses about what's happening.

As you document, demand that law enforcement present a signed **judicial warrant**. While in many cases, they aren't legally required to present the warrant, persist in asking. If provided, capture a photo.

Immediately following the interaction,

- Take notes on behavior of police and federal agents, arrests, and environment.
- Get names and contact info of witnesses/family members.



## S.A.L.U.T.E.

When documenting, practice S.A.L.U.T.E.  
*(credit to LA journalist Justin Caffier)*

**Size:** How many people and/or vehicles do you see?

**Activity:** What, specifically, are they doing that's suspicious?

**Location:** What address, cross streets, or landmarks are they at (the more specific the better)?

**Uniform:** What are they wearing, whether it's fatigues, nondescript civilian clothes, or something else entirely?

**Time:** What date and time did you observe them?

**Equipment:** What guns, weapons, or devices do they appear to be carrying?



## A Note about Warrants

ICE may claim to have a warrant and present an alternative document, such as an administrative warrant. An administrative warrant is not legally enforceable in the same way as a signed judicial warrant. Even if ICE provides a signed warrant, the date or other details may still be incorrect.

**DO NOT** disregard protocol, whether or not ICE has a proper warrant. Your job is to document so that those determinations can be handled in court by our legal partners.





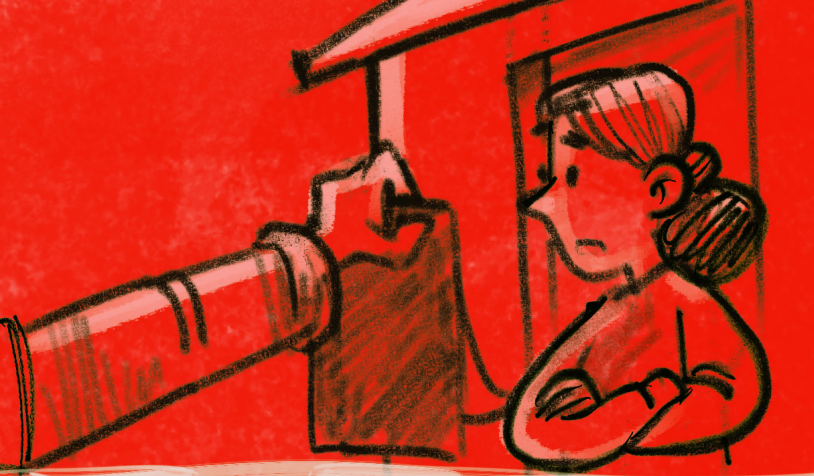
## #2 Inform about Civil Rights

Who has rights in the United States? Everyone! Here are some key rights outlined in the U.S. Constitution:

- **4th Amendment:** Right to privacy. ICE and police CANNOT enter a person's home without permission, or a warrant signed by a judge.
- **5th Amendment:** Right to remain silent. You can refuse to sign documents or provide documents.
- **6th Amendment:** Right to seek legal counsel. You have the right to be advised on criminal and immigration consequences.

Constitutional Observers should carry **Red Cards**, so they can present and read correct legal information out loud to those present during an enforcement.







## You Have Constitutional Rights:

- **DO NOT OPEN THE DOOR** if an immigration agent is knocking. If you are inside of your house, show the card through the window or slide it under the door.
- **DO NOT ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS** from an immigration agent if they try to talk to you. You have the right to remain silent.
- **DO NOT SIGN ANYTHING** without first speaking to a lawyer. You have the right to speak with a lawyer.
- If you are outside of your house, **SHOW THIS CARD TO THE AGENT**. Ask the agent if you are free to leave and if they say you can, leave calmly.

*[www.RedCardOrders.com](http://www.RedCardOrders.com)*



# No Obstruction


Do NOT obstruct an arrest under ANY circumstances.

If you attempt to physically block or touch an ICE agent, you increase your personal risk of arrest.

Remember that after Constitutional Observation, our legal partners will take the lead.

## If Stopped by Law Enforcement

- Stay calm.
- Don't run or resist.
- Ask: "Am I being detained?" and "Am I free to go?"
- If arrested, say: "I want to remain silent and speak to a lawyer".



I WANT TO REMAIN  
SILENT AND SPEAK  
TO A LAWYER

## #3 Share Support Resources

Carry *The Handbook* for support resources. If possible, you should offer to connect the loved ones of those detained to a local legal helpline:



Remember that following an enforcement, you should immediately contact COPAL or a similar trusted organization and leave a message if we are unavailable. Here is COPAL's contact information:



**IMMIGRANT  
DEFENSE  
NETWORK**



KNOW  
YOUR  
RIGHTS

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