

To: Members of Senate Committee on Judiciary
From: Social Action Team of Hedding United Methodist Church
Re: S-209 An act relating to prohibiting civil arrest in sensitive locations
Date: 3 February 2026

The Social Action Team of the Hedding United Methodist Church in Barre is submitting this statement in support of S-209, an act relating to prohibiting civil arrest in sensitive locations, as well as a request for an amendment to the bill as introduced.

Following the Social Principles outlaid by the General Council of the United Methodist Church, Hedding United Methodist Church has been actively engaged in putting our faith into action by identifying and responding to the needs of our community. These actions have included: a diaper bank, a food shelf, a clothing rack, and community meals. These services are open to all and are located in the public areas of the church building. We are informed that the ICE policy that would identify churches as a sensitive location has been rescinded (1) so that without proper signage ICE is allowed entry into the public areas of the church without a warrant.

Hedding has created the advised signage and posted it on all entrances clearly identifying the church building as private property and prohibiting entry to ICE without a judicial warrant. However, the signage is homemade and is one of many signs on the entrance. And even with signage in place, it does not necessarily create a safe environment where people are willing to access services.

We ask the committee to consider adding “churches and houses of worship” to section (c) (1) Prohibition of the bill that identifies what are considered sensitive locations.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Keith E Goslant
Co-Chair
Social Action Team
Hedding United Methodist Church

(1) The Status of Protected Locations

In the past, ICE followed a policy that generally avoided enforcement actions in certain sensitive locations, such as churches, schools, and hospitals. However, this guidance changed significantly on January 31, 2025, when a memo was issued stating that these areas are no longer protected from immigration enforcement arrests.

This change means that agents now have more discretion when deciding where to conduct enforcement activities. While these spaces were once treated differently, the current policy no longer provides the same level of protection for people inside houses of worship that they may have expected in previous years.



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When Agents Can Enter a Church

ICE agents are allowed to enter public areas of a church without needing permission or a warrant. These areas typically include spaces that are open to the general public, such as a lobby or the main worship area. If a space is held open for anyone to enter, agents can walk in just like any other member of the community.

For private or non-public areas, such as church offices or residential living spaces, the rules are stricter. To enter these spaces without the church's permission, agents must have a judicial warrant or a subpoena. A judicial warrant is a document signed by a judge, which is different from an administrative warrant. An administrative warrant is a form issued by ICE or the Department of Homeland Security and does not give agents the legal authority to enter private areas unless a church official gives them consent to do so.

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