

Malden woman pleads for return of husband taken by ICE on way to work

By [Sean Cotter](#) Globe Staff, Updated September 19, 2025, 7:37 p.m.



Leslie Perlera Gonzalez, wife of Edgar Hernan Elias Escobar, held a press conference about her husband's detention by ICE. DAVID L RYAN/ GLOBE STAFF

As immigration enforcement ramped up in Massachusetts over the past several months, Leslie Perlera Gonzalez grew scared for her husband.

“I lived in constant fear that if my phone rings, something bad is happening,” she said.

This week, her fear came true: Her husband, Edgar Hernan Elias Escobar, called her to say that masked federal agents had rammed their car into his to stop it as he went to work, smashed the window, and pointed a stun gun at his head.

She quickly drove to the scene of the arrest in Malden, and saw the agents around him. She has not seen him since they took him away.

“Hernan and I have tried really hard to bring peace into our home,” she said, tears drawing her makeup into dark gray lines down her cheeks. “And that was shattered on Wednesday.”

The arrest was among [several over recent weeks that raised concerns](#) among immigrants, community advocates, and public officials over aggressive tactics Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other federal agents have used, often masked and in unmarked cars.

In a statement Friday, the Department of Homeland Security confirmed the arrest and alleged Elias Escobar refused agents’ commands to roll down his car window and comply.

“The officers took appropriate action and followed their training to use the minimum amount of force necessary to resolve the situation in a manner that ensured the success of the operation and prioritized the safety of the public and our officers,” the agency said in a statement. DHS added that agents took him to the hospital as a precaution, but medical staff said he was not injured.

The agency did not directly respond to questions about why it targeted him.

A lawyer working with the family confirmed that Elias Escobar was in the country without authorization, but said the 31-year-old roofer, who's lived in the United States for a decade, had no criminal record. He and Perlera Gonzalez, who's a US citizen and a lawyer, had filed a petition earlier this year to move toward legal status through their marriage.

The alleged details of the arrest come amid an ongoing surge of immigration enforcement. The push, [dubbed "Operation Patriot 2.0,"](#) follows months of increased enforcement under President Trump, who won the White House after running on the promise of mass deportations.

So far this year, immigration arrests have been up significantly. And even as some New England states and local communities have sought to undermine ICE actions through the passage of laws aimed at restricting state and local authorities from cooperating with ICE, [the federal government has built an efficient infrastructure](#) geared at making more arrests and quickly moving people toward deportation. There are more agents, more detention beds, and more flights bringing detainees to courts outside the area to face deportation proceedings.

Trump has said the efforts focus on the "worst of the worst" criminals, and his administration has pointed to cases of violent criminals and sex offenders arrested by ICE, including in the Boston area. But the arrests of people like Elias Escobar, where there's no claim of a criminal record, have increasingly occurred, data shows.

"We're seeing more and more calls from families of people who've been detained and the people who are being detained have many different situations," said Maggie Morgan, an attorney for Elias Escobar and an immigration attorney at Greater Boston Legal Services, where Perlera Gonzalez also works. "Many are already in some form of legal process in an attempt to get legal status."

Officials representing Malden, including Representative Katherine Clark, criticized ICE's tactics and called for an end to the enforcement surge.

“In the past few weeks, reports of capricious immigration actions in public spaces have increased roughly ten-fold,” they wrote. “This escalation of actions, which Federal officials publicly claim is politically motivated, is making our safe community far less safe.”

Elias Escobar's attorneys have filed a petition to stop him from being moved, and are reviewing next steps as they seek his release. Morgan said he does not have a previous order of removal from immigration court, which she hopes will support his case.

According to a federal inmate locator, Elias Escobar was being held as of Friday evening at the Plymouth County Correctional Facility, the sole ICE detention facility in Massachusetts.

On Friday, Perlera Gonzalez, 31, sat on her couch in front of TV cameras and reporters and cried as she recounted their story. She said she spoke to Elias Escobar by phone on Thursday, though the background noise made it difficult to hear — [data shows](#) the Plymouth detention facility to be increasingly crowded. But she understood he was cold, and she sent him some money to his commissary account for him to buy a sweatshirt.

She said she hopes he did, though she worries that he bought it and gave it to someone else.

“My husband is a gentle soul,” she said. Now, Perlera Gonzalez said, she and the couple's beloved wheaten terrier, Albert, are waiting despondently for him to return.

Perlera Gonzalez said her husband left his native El Salvador a decade ago after he'd drawn the ire of a violent gang after he'd refused to hand over his possessions during a robbery. He came to the United States fearing for his life, she said. She met him through a cousin, and they married two years ago.

Perlera Gonzalez said she sought to tell her family's story to add context to Trump's calls for an immigration crackdown, saying everyone, including those without criminal records, has been affected.

"I was just thinking about how angry everyone is, and how everyone in this country has a reason to be angry, but I would like everyone to put the anger aside and tap into the part that loves their family and their dogs and humanity and all of the good things," she said. "I would like you to tap into that side and have compassion for me and my husband. I know my husband is not angry."

Sean Cotter can be reached at sean.cotter@globe.com. Follow him [@cotterreporter](https://twitter.com/cotterreporter).

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