

PRESS STATEMENT

ISSUED BY: Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network (WAISN), Redmond United Methodist Church, Church Council of Greater Seattle, Muslim Association of Puget Sound--American Muslim Empowerment Network (MAPS-AMEN), Centro Cultural Mexicano

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As Temperatures Drop, Immigration Enforcement Sightings At Faith-Based Emergency Shelters May Deter Families From Accessing Life-Saving Services

Redmond, WA (Nov. 27, 2019): Over the weekend of November 22-24, 2019, Redmond United Methodist Church (UMC) and the New Bethlehem Day Center in Kirkland reported two separate incidents of potential immigration enforcement-related activity to the Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network (WAISN). In coordination with the respective organizations, with the support of local elected officials and by following the appropriate chain of command to multiple potential enforcement agencies, we are investigating the reported activity, with the hope to provide clarity to the community and demand transparency and accountability from the immigration-related agencies within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

On November 23rd, a social worker working at the family shelter offered at Redmond UMC reported seeing a U.S. Customs and Border Protection marked vehicle at 12:44am parked across the street from the shelter/church on 80th St in Redmond, WA. There was a woman standing outside a vehicle with the insignia of "U.S. Customs & Border Protection: Field Operations" talking to people inside the vehicle. This same woman had come inside the shelter earlier that evening (11/22) around 8:30pm when the shelter opened, representing herself to be someone in need of housing and asking questions about the facility and about a specific family at the shelter composed of a father, mother and two small children.

As further elaborated by Laurie Biethan:

"..... Immediately before she entered, the targeted family had somehow realized that the situation was not safe, so they left their meals uneaten and some of their belongings behind and slipped out a side door. Nobody saw them leave. Believing the agent was genuinely in need, the social worker got her more information about the women's shelter. The agent then began peppering the social worker with questions: Could she see our kitchen? (No, that was for staff only.) What was in that closet? (A washer and dryer.) Could she see it? (No, same reason.) The social workers, confused, offered her a meal and a bus ticket to get to the women's shelter, but she turned them down. The agent then walked out the door.

She returned several minutes later while the social worker was occupied with our other families and used the time to approach residents of the shelter, attempting

to get information about the targeted family. She started by asking our residents questions like, "Where do you go in the mornings? Where do the kids go to school?" and then continued with, "I'm looking for a family that looks white, but isn't." When the social worker discovered her harassing our other guests, she was asked to leave..."

On Sunday, November 24, around 2pm, it was reported that the woman who had been asking questions about a specific family -- and was then seen talking to the CBP-marked vehicle outside Redmond UMC -- showed up at the New Bethlehem Day Center for homeless families in Kirkland. Additional details are being investigated.

The Redmond United Methodist Church provides space for an [Emergency Winter Shelter](#), operated by Catholic Community Services to shelter families who are experiencing homelessness during the months of October-December.

"A key tenet of our faith is to welcome the stranger with compassion and care," stated **Rev. Lara Bolger, pastor at Redmond UMC**. She continued: "We've been doing that by providing shelter for people experiencing homelessness in partnership with other social service organizations, faith-based organizations, community members, local businesses, and our local government with full support and without interference for over 25 years. We are very concerned about the fear this has caused and want to continue working with others to create a safe and loving community for all people, especially those who are most vulnerable."

Since the immigration-related activity was reported to WAISN, we have been conducting a series of information gathering actions including:

- engaging with individual Redmond City Councilmembers and Redmond Police Department to determine whether there was any knowledge of any immigration-enforcement activity in Redmond & Kirkland, and raising community concerns about any such actions.
- issuing public records requests seeking information and dash-cam footage about these incidents.
- communicating with U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE), which responded "ICE does not target sensitive locations, nor was ICE involved in any enforcement actions in the vicinity or time period you indicated." (Melissa Nitsch, Community Relations Officer at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), via email on Nov 25, 2019 at 9:30AM PST)
- communicating with U.S. Border Patrol, which responded: "There were no U.S. Border Patrol personnel involved in any enforcement actions at the Redmond United Methodist Church or in the city of Redmond, Washington." (statement by CBP provided on Nov. 25 via Melissa Nitsch)
- reaching out to U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) via telephone and email—we're awaiting their response.
- engaging local, county, state and federal officials to urgently inquire with CBP on any and all activity conducted in or near these two sensitive locations with the

goal of receiving clarity and transparency from the agency on their procedures and actions.

- coordinating with local organizations to provide training and resources to the community and to sensitive locations including shelters.
- continuing to discuss these urgent safety concerns with other faith leaders, law enforcement and governmental officials.

While we are working to resolve these troubling reports, we recommend community service providers--including **shelters and food banks**--take the following actions to protect our communities' access to life-saving resources and support.

- Share the sensitive location protocol from FOOD LIFELINE (bit.ly/FoodLifeLineProtocol) and El Centro De La Raza (bit.ly/SensitiveLocationsToolKit)
- Train your team in Deportation Defense (waisn.org/deportation-defense) and post a WAISN Workplace Audit & Raids Protocol at your site: English: bit.ly/WAISNWorksiteProtocol & Spanish: bit.ly/WAISNAreasDeTrabajo
- Remind our broader immigrant and refugee communities that #WeHaveRights and to create their Deportation Defense plan and team by downloading on their mobile phones Notifica (<https://notifica.us/>).
- If you or your family are directly contacted by any immigration enforcement agency and/or are directly impacted in any other way, call the WAISN Hotline (1-844-724-3737) for assistance.
- If you or your organization, facility, institution and/or group witness any immigration activity by ICE or CBP, report it as soon as possible to our WAISN Hotline (1-844-724-3737). Please exercise your rights to take pictures and/or video recordings, and we highly recommend NOT to post on social media or other platforms until the reports have been verified by WAISN through our rapid response teams across the state.
- If any community member witnessed either of the two incidents at Redmond UMC or the Day Center in Kirkland, and/or has any pictures, video recordings, or further information, please reach out as soon as possible to info@waisn.org.

“No one should have to choose between dealing with immigration matters or accessing shelter and food,” stated **Aneelah Afzali, WAISN Steering Committee member and Executive Director of the American Muslim Empowerment Network at the Muslim Association of Puget Sound (MAPS-AMEN)**. She added: “We stand firm and united as a larger community on the Eastside and beyond against any immigration enforcement activity by CBP or other DHS agencies at places of worship and shelters providing life-saving resources. We will continue to work collectively toward ensuring safety and livelihood to all members of our human family.”

The aggressive border and interior enforcement of the last three years has wrought havoc in the lives of families. Families belong together and free from violence and persecution. People without homes and people who migrate in order to survive suffer from trauma, while striving for peace and safety in their lives. The witnessed presence of a CBP vehicle in a sensitive location, specifically a church building, raises the level of fear in our

communities, both among those seeking shelter and those in the immigration process. We object to any presence of immigration-enforcement at “sensitive locations” in the strongest possible terms, and will hold agencies and elected officials accountable to ensure transparency, accountability and justice.

Our communities are resilient and powerful. We stand together as immigrants and their families and loved ones, people of faith, community leaders, and social service providers to say that we reaffirm our solidarity with one another. When held together by the circle of community, our bond together cannot be broken. “Like a tree standing by the water, we shall not be moved.”

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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- Laurie Biethan, Redmond UMC Shelter, laurie.biethan@gmail.com
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The Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network is a powerful coalition of over 100 immigrant and refugee rights organizations and individuals in 22 counties across Washington state that strive to protect, serve, and strengthen our communities. The role of the network is to provide support, capacity, and resources to organizations whose efforts build power and a united voice in Washington. Learn more here www.WAISN.org