

Asylum seeker petitions for release from ICE custody

Miranda Cyr

Eugene Register-Guard

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An evidentiary hearing has revealed additional details about what happened during a FBI raid at the Woodland Creek Apartments in October.

West Eugene residents woke to loud noises the morning of Oct. 15 as FBI agents executed a raid on a Bailey Hill Road apartment, resulting in the detention of four immigrants. One of the detainees, referred to as "H.L." in the courtroom, is appealing his detention. During his testimony, he spoke about that chaotic morning.

H.L., who lives in the apartment complex in a different unit, had been visiting his friends to watch a movie and play on their gaming console. He said he ended up falling asleep on the couch at their apartment. He was awoken suddenly on the morning of Oct. 15 by what he described as something he would see in a movie. FBI agents had thrown flash bangs, grenades that produce a bright flash of light and loud bang, into the apartment, breaking the windows. He could hear sirens and someone yelling over a speaker outside for everyone inside to come out with their hands raised.

H.L. testified that he walked out barefoot over broken glass in his T-shirt and boxers with his arms up. He said as he walked out, multiple red dots appeared on his body, which he realized were from the sights of weapons being trained on him.

Once in federal custody, H.L. was led back inside the apartment where he was able to put on a quarter-zip sweater belonging to his friend. Nearly a full month later, H.L. appeared in the federal courthouse in Eugene still wearing the same quarter-zip and T-shirt underneath during his evidentiary hearing on Nov. 14.

He and three others in the apartment were taken to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement office in Eugene. He said there, he was denied an attorney. All four were then taken to the ICE Northwest Detention Center (NWDC) in Tacoma, Washington. H.L. has remained at NWDC,

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while the other three have been transferred to other centers. Local immigration attorney Katrina Kilgren said a high volume of detainees are being transferred from the NWDC to facilities in Mississippi, New Mexico, Louisiana and Texas.

There has been extensive reporting on the poor conditions in ICE facilities. Detainees and their representatives are going hungry, as reported by USA TODAY. A report from the University of Washington Center for Human Rights found NWDC lacks sanitation, generates complaints about spoiled food, and recorded chemical and physical use of force. The report, published in 2020, also found that NWDC “detains people longer, on average, in solitary confinement than any other dedicated ICE facility in the nation.”

The justification for the FBI raid remains unclear.

How a Venezuelan asylum seeker ended up in Eugene

According to court documents, H.L. fled Venezuela, seeking asylum in the U.S. H.L. had “long-opposed the authoritarian government of Venezuela.” The government labeled him a traitor.

“I left my country ... because I was scared for my life,” H.L. said in Spanish during the hearing. Two translators interpreted for H.L.



The FBI conducted a raid at the Woodland Creek apartments in Eugene the morning of Oct. 15. HALEIGH KOCHANSKI / THE REGISTER-GUARD

He came to Oregon to live with his daughter, son-in-law and grandson, who were already in the area.

The process to seek asylum is a long one and can vary greatly from case to case.

H.L. traveled through seven countries, arriving in Mexico in May 2024. He spent over 2 months checking the CBPOne app every morning to schedule an asylum appointment at a legal point of entry rather than crossing the border illegally. Shortly after President Donald Trump took office, he discontinued this appointment service, repurposing it into the “CBP Home” app, which migrants can use to “self deport.”

H.L. was able to obtain an asylum appointment at the end of July 2024, entering the U.S. under an immigration parole, which temporarily grants migrants permission to stay in the U.S. He was approved to remain in the U.S. while awaiting his first asylum court

date.

According to court documents, H.L. has no criminal history and had never missed any of his ICE check-ins. He was approved to work in the U.S. and was working for driving apps like Lyft, Uber and DoorDash.

Asylum seeker files for release from ICE detention

H.L. filed for writ of habeas corpus, meaning he was unlawfully detained. He was represented by two attorneys, Robert Easton and Cristine Zeller-Powell from Catholic Community Services of Lane County, which is tied to the Equity Corps of Oregon, a free immigration legal services provider.

H.L.’s attorneys argue ICE violated due process in detaining him.

ICE’s attorney argued H.L. had not reported a change of address, warranting his arrest. They submitted new evi-

dence including more than 40 images of H.L. or his vehicle near the friend’s apartment and a piece of mail in H.L.’s name sent to the friend’s apartment. H.L.’s attorneys insisted he did not live at the other apartment.

H.L. said he would often cook traditional Venezuelan food with his friends who occupied the apartment where he was found. When the group would stay up late gaming on a PlayStation or watching movies, H.L. occasionally fell asleep there, he said. He sometimes didn’t want to return to his own unit to avoid possibly waking up his 7-year-old grandson.

In addition to H.L. himself, his attorneys called on two more witnesses: H.L.’s next-door neighbor, who said she can hear him snoring through the walls every night, and local immigration attorney Katrina Kilgren, who is representing H.L. in his immigration case.

H.L.’s family did not attend H.L.’s hearing out to fear, according to representatives from the local rapid response network.

Judge Ann Aiken did not make a ruling on H.L.’s case on Nov. 14.

Easton called Aiken a “thoughtful judge” and told The Register-Guard he believes she will make a ruling quickly.

Kilgren stated via email if Aiken rules in favor of ICE, H.L. will remain in immigration detention as he awaits his asylum hearing, which is set to go to court in March 2027.

Miranda Cyr reports on education for The Register-Guard. You can contact her at mcyr@registerguard.com or find her on X @mirandabecyr.