

Guidance on Federal Immigration Activity

Updated 2/17/26

UW-Madison is providing this information as an update to older guidance and as part of its ongoing commitment to keeping the campus community as informed as possible.

Guidance on federal immigration activity

UW–Madison is committed to maintaining a safe and inclusive environment that facilitates campus operations and the university’s teaching, research and outreach missions — including students' ability to access education — without disruption.

The university strives to create an environment that protects the privacy and rights of students, faculty, and staff under the law.

The university provides information on the immigration status of its students, faculty, and staff only when required by law.

Campus leaders, including in the Office of Legal Affairs, UW–Madison Police Department (UWPD), the International Division, and University Relations, continue to closely monitor federal immigration policies and enforcement that may affect UW–Madison students and employees.

If you have questions related to this information, email the Office of Strategic Communication at contact.strategiccommunication@wisc.edu.

Frequently asked questions

Public Safety

Who should I call in the event of an emergency situation?

In the event of any emergency, dial 911 or UWPD at (608) 264-2677.

What role does UWPD play in the actions of federal agencies concerning enforcement of immigration laws?

UWPD has a set of procedures and practices it follows related to immigration enforcement, and its officers will not detain or arrest an individual solely based on a suspected violation of immigration law and will not routinely inquire about an individual's immigration status.

Will UWPD participate in federal immigration enforcement operations?

No. UWPD will not participate in federal immigration enforcement actions. Federal agents must use appropriate legal processes if they are on campus and wish to contact individuals about enforcement-related issues.

Does an individual's immigration status affect how UWPD provides public safety services?

No. An individual's immigration status does not determine whether UWPD will provide campus and community safety-related services and will only be relevant if the individual is involved in serious crimes. An individual's immigration status does not affect their ability to file a police report with UWPD.

Will the university issue WiscAlerts or some other notification if/when federal law enforcement is sighted on campus?

The university does not routinely utilize WiscAlerts — UW–Madison's emergency notification system — to notify campus of federal or other law enforcement presence.

Permissible use of WiscAlerts is defined by federal law and regulations.

The appropriate use of WiscAlerts includes: active harm (e.g., shooter), significant and serious hazardous materials spill, closing a section of campus, significant disruption to campus infrastructure, multiple building closings, a mass casualty disaster or active tornado warnings in the campus vicinity.

Using the system other than as required by law and in compliance with campus policy can subject the university to federal investigation and significant penalties.

If an incident becomes an immediate threat to the health or safety of students or employees on campus, a WiscAlert may be issued.

Should I call UWPD if I see federal agents on campus?

A sighting of, or an arrest by, federal law enforcement on campus does not necessitate a call to 911 or the UWPD non-emergency line unless one of the below criteria apply:

- Your physical safety, or that of someone else, is in immediate jeopardy
- There is civil disorder or a likelihood of violence
- Destruction of property is occurring

Who should I call if I am approached by a federal law enforcement officer in a campus facility or workplace?

If approached by a federal law enforcement officer in a campus facility or workplace, immediately call the Office of Legal Affairs at (608) 263-7400 and ask to speak with a campus attorney. The OLA office number is answered 24/7. OLA will promptly notify UWPD. Additional detail on these interactions is included in the section below.

For off-campus areas, what policies does the Madison Police Department follow on immigration?

Madison Police Department says that “an individual’s immigration status is immaterial with respect to MPD’s mission statement, vision statement, core values, and operational systems. Immigration status is only relevant when an officer reasonably believes that an individual has committed serious crimes directly related to public safety.” MPD has posted its own policies on the issue.

Federal law enforcement access to campus spaces

Can the university prohibit federal law enforcement agencies from coming on campus?

Generally, no. However, federal agents are only able to access public spaces; access to limited access areas require a search warrant.

What should I do if a government agent comes to a campus facility or workplace?

There are a number of steps to take, outlined below.

- Stay calm and remain polite. Take enough time to think through and formulate your answers.
- Ask the agent for their name and to see their government issued badge. Most likely the agent will show you their badge without you asking. If not, it is your right to ask for this.
- Verify the agent’s identity and agency with badge and ask the agent why they are on campus, if they have not shared that information already.
- Ask the agent to have a seat in a waiting room or lobby. If you do not have such a space, politely ask them to wait where they are while you try to reach the proper contacts.

- Call the Office of Legal Affairs at 608-263-7400 and speak with one of the attorneys. The OLA office number is answered 24/7. Tell the attorney the following information: “Agent X from the Department of Y is here to talk to you about Z.” Do not leave a voicemail message with Legal Affairs, choose an option on the menu to reach the answering service.
- If no one from Legal Affairs is available, tell the agent that no one is available right now. Ask the agent if they can come back another time.
- Do not give the agent access to any paper files or access to any computer systems. Agents are free to enter any public areas of your workplace but must have a valid search warrant to enter a non-public area.

What should a student employee do if approached?

If the agent approaches a student worker, the student should immediately get their supervisor. If their supervisor is not available, the student worker should contact a divisional HR representative. The supervisor and/or HR representative should then assume responsibility for the encounter. In order to facilitate this, all units should make readily available the appropriate contact information.

What happens once I call OLA? Will a representative of OLA speak with the federal agent?

The attorney on call will ask the caller to describe the encounter in detail and review the contents of the warrant or any other legal document that is presented to the employee.

What happens if the federal agent ignores my request?

If agents disregard your instructions or requests, do not interfere with their actions.

If agents act — with or without awaiting guidance from you or others on campus and regardless of whether they have presented a warrant — it is important that you do not intervene or block their movement, as obstructing or otherwise interfering with law enforcement activity can be a crime.

Public versus non-public areas

What areas of UW’s workspaces are accessible?

Agents are free to enter any public areas of your workplace but must have a valid warrant to enter a non-public area. Employees may say to the law enforcement agent, “I am not

authorized to give you consent to enter or accept legal documents,” and contact the Office of Legal Affairs as directed above.

What constitutes a public area?

As a public institution, many areas within the campus and its facilities are open to the public. Generally, federal law enforcement officers are authorized by law to enter public spaces without special permission. Public areas may include sidewalks; green spaces; parking lots and ramps; and lobby, waiting, or hallway areas that are open to the public. Campus libraries and museums that are open to the general public are also generally considered public areas. Campus events, such as lectures, forums and performances that are free and open to the public, or meetings subject to the Wisconsin Open Meetings law, are also generally deemed to be public areas.

What are limited access areas or non-public areas?

Some university areas, such as faculty, staff and student offices; residence halls; laboratories; and areas accessible only by a key or key card, are not open to the public without permission.

Classrooms are also limited access areas while classes are in session, unless the classroom is hosting an event open to the public. Other limited access areas would include areas only available to staff or individuals with a staff escort, areas holding events that require a ticket for admittance, areas only available to university patients or research participants, privately or university-owned vehicles, and other areas as long as there is a reasonable expectation of privacy in that space.

Generally, federal law enforcement may not enter limited access areas without permission unless the officer presents a valid search warrant or exigent circumstances are present.

What constitutes a valid warrant?

A valid warrant must be signed and dated by a judge. It will include a period within which the search must be conducted, a description of the premises to be searched, and a list of items to be searched for and seized (e.g., payroll records, employee identification documents, etc.).

Can I install a sign that says “PRIVATE” or “UNIVERSITY PERSONNEL ONLY” or similar in my space or on the door to my building?

The university is exploring ways to better distinguish public versus non-public areas and will share additional information as these efforts are developed.

Only authorized university officials such as Facilities Planning & Management and/or building managers may affix limited access signage inside campus buildings. Signs are not to be placed on exterior doors of campus facilities.

Can a student refuse to allow a federal law enforcement agent to enter a residence hall room without a warrant?

Yes. A residential hall room is considered a limited access area and cannot be legally accessed by federal law enforcement officers without a valid warrant, the voluntary consent of the occupant, or exigent circumstances. A student need not allow entry to any law enforcement officer who is not in possession of a warrant.

Can the Office of Legal Affairs represent individuals for personal legal matters?

No. OLA represents the university, including employees acting in their official capacities. OLA does not represent faculty, staff or students in personal legal matters outside the scope of their business as university officials. Individuals in need of personal legal assistance may contact the [State Bar of Wisconsin Lawyer Referral and Information Service](#) at (608) 257-4666 or (608) 257-3838.

Additional privacy information

What does UWPD do with its Flock Safety cameras?

UWPD uses a limited number of automated license plate reader cameras provided by Flock Safety to support the critical mission of keeping the campus community safe.

The still cameras are built to support crime prevention and investigations by helping UWPD quickly identify vehicles tied to serious incidents, such as Amber Alerts, violent crime, stolen vehicles, and missing persons. The cameras are focused on vehicle data — not individuals. The technology captures license plates and vehicle characteristics from fixed, visible public locations. It does not gather personal identity details about drivers or passengers, and it does not use facial recognition.

Are Flock images used to track people?

The images collected are not used to monitor or track individuals' movements on campus and are not used to conduct random or continuous surveillance. They are not used to track vehicles for immigration enforcement, nor do they have the capability to identify drivers or vehicle occupants through facial recognition.

Per UWPD policy, internal access to the system is restricted to authorized UWPD personnel only. All access is logged and audited to ensure compliance with UWPD policy and procedures.

Does UWPD share immigration data from traffic stops or other police interactions with students, staff, or faculty with federal immigration authorities?

No. UWPD does not share information gathered from routine encounters with federal authorities.

What if law enforcement officers or federal or other agencies request private student information? Will the university give it to them?

The university provides information on the immigration status of students only when required by law. If asked by an agent to provide private information, you may say “I am not authorized to provide the requested information,” and contact the Office of Legal Affairs.

Campus Resources

Universities of Wisconsin guidance: <https://www.wisconsin.edu/government-relations/2025/04/08/communication-to-uw-campus-regarding-agents-visiting-facilities/>

UWPD Immigration Practices: <https://uwpd.wisc.edu/data-policies-resources/uwpd-immigration-practices/>

Campus message: Spring 2026 guidance on federal immigration actions
<https://news.wisc.edu/spring-2026-guidance-on-federal-immigration-actions/>

ISS: Resources on immigration issues: <https://iss.wisc.edu/resources-on-immigration-issues/>

Guidelines for Political Activity and Public Advocacy on Campus

<https://free-expression.wisc.edu/policies-and-guidelines/political-activity-and-public-advocacy-on-campus-guidelines/>

Expressive Activity Guide

<https://free-expression.wisc.edu/policies-and-guidelines/expressive-activity-guide/>

Office of Federal Relations: <https://federalrelations.wisc.edu/>

International Faculty and Staff Services: <https://ifss.wisc.edu/>

Translations: Guidance If Any Government Agent Comes to Your UW Workplace

The resource guide is available in

- [中文/Chinese](#)
- [English](#)
- [Hmoob/Hmong](#)
- [नेपाली /Nepali](#)
- [Español/Spanish](#)
- [བོད་ཡིག་/Tibetan](#)

Local Resources

City of Madison Know Your Rights

<https://www.cityofmadison.com/mayor/priorities/know-your-rights>

City of Madison Police Department immigration standard operating procedure:

<https://www.cityofmadison.com/police/documents/sop/EnforcementofImmigrationLaws.pdf>

Understanding your rights

- [Protest and Activism: Know Your Rights](#)
- [Know Your Rights “Red Card”](#) (available in several languages)
- [Know your Rights: If ICE Visits Your Home](#)
- [American Civil Liberties Union](#)

- Rights and Protection for Temporary Workers (Wilberforce Pamphlet from the U.S. Department of State)