

For Immediate Release
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Contact: Jorge L. Barón, NWIRP, 206.957.8609
Seattle, WA

NWIRP Challenges Local Law Enforcement Use of U.S. Border Patrol Agents as “Interpreters”

Seattle - Today, Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP) and cooperating attorneys Elizabeth Hawkins and Wendy Hernandez filed a civil rights complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security challenging the practice of local, state and federal law enforcement agencies calling in U.S. Border Patrol agents as “interpreters” for routine matters. The complaint asserts that this practice violates federal laws including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, by failing to ensure that all persons have access to government services, regardless of limited English skills.

The complaint was filed on behalf of six individuals residing in different regions of Washington State including:

A.B., who is a mother of two young U.S. citizen children and was fourteen weeks pregnant when a vehicle in which she was a passenger was pulled over for speeding by the Washington State Patrol (WSP) last February. The incident was taped by a WSP dashboard camera. Click [here](#) to watch a four minute excerpt. She was ultimately detained and placed in removal (deportation) proceedings when Border Patrol agents were called to the scene. A.B. had no prior criminal or immigration history, but is now facing deportation as a result of the Border Patrol’s involvement as “interpreters.” A.B. is a member of the Mount Vernon, Washington community and has lived there for four years.

C.D., was a passenger along with her two young children in a vehicle that was pulled over by a Whatcom County Sheriff’s officer in March 2010. At the time, C.D. was 40 weeks pregnant and was expected to give birth within days. She and her U.S. citizen children were detained and taken to the Sumas Border Patrol station when Border Patrol agents were called to provide interpretation during the traffic stop. C.D. had no prior criminal or immigration history, but is now facing deportation as a result of the Border Patrol’s involvement as “interpreters.” C.D. is a member of the Bellingham, Washington community and has lived there for four years.

“Law enforcement agencies who attempt to use Border Patrol for alleged ‘interpretation assistance’ during routine matters are failing to provide meaningful access to their services to people with limited English skills, as they are required to do under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and Executive Order 13166,” said Jorge L. Barón, executive director of Northwest Immigrant Rights Project. The complaint asks the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security to take steps to stop this illegal practice.

As part of the complaint, Northwest Immigrant Rights Project also released [excerpts of a video](#) from a dashboard camera in a Washington State Patrol vehicle during an incident in which U.S. Border Patrol agents were brought in for “interpretation assistance.” One of the Border Patrol agents describes the

occupants of the vehicle, including A.B. introduced above, as being “all wet,” at one point in [the video](#).

The complaint criticizes local Border Patrol officials for making public statements suggesting that immigration enforcement activities are not carried out when agents provide interpretation assistance. Just weeks ago, a Border Patrol spokesperson [told a public radio reporter](#) who inquired about the practice: “We’re strictly there for translation in that type of request.” Jorge L. Barón of Northwest Immigrant Rights Project noted that, “Border Patrol’s public statements about their practices when they purport to provide interpretation assistance have been, at best, misleading. The video that is being released today shows that agents in fact question and detain individuals who were witnesses and bystanders.”

The complaint also points out that this practice is completely inconsistent with the Obama Administration’s stated priorities for immigration enforcement. “President Obama has been telling the country that he is focusing his harsh enforcement measures on ‘violent offenders and people convicted of crimes’ and not on families,” said Barón. “The actions of the Border Patrol in the cases outlined in this complaint, all of which involve individuals with extensive ties in the community and no criminal record, demonstrate that this is not actually the case.”

To protect the identities and privacy of the complainants, the redacted version of the complaint can be found [here](#).

Last week, NWIRP joined the ACLU of Washington in [filing a lawsuit](#) against the Border Patrol regarding suspicionless vehicle stops in the Olympic Peninsula.

[Click here for a PDF of the redacted complaint.](#)

[Click here to go to the four minute excerpt of the WA State Patrol/Border Patrol video.](#)

[Click here to download the full two hour WA State Patrol/Border Patrol video.](#)

[Click here for stories of the six complainants.](#)

[Click here to go to the press release for last week’s law suit against Border Patrol.](#)

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Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP) is the only nonprofit organization providing comprehensive immigration legal services to low-income individuals and families in Washington State. Learn more at www.nwirp.org

Elizabeth Hawkins is a private immigration attorney with the law firm of [Bean Porter Hawkins PLLC](#) and a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA). Ms. Hawkins represents one of the individuals filing a complaint.

[Wendy Hernandez](#) is a private immigration attorney in Walla Walla, Washington, and a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA). Ms. Hernandez represents one of the individuals filing a complaint.

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Northwest Immigrant Rights Project promotes justice for low-income immigrants in Washington State by pursuing and defending their legal status. We focus on providing direct legal services, supported by our education and public policy work.