

Leading Language Organizations Respond to the Detention of Interpreter Meenu Batra

We, the undersigned language organizations, express our alarm at the detention of Meenu Batra, a Master-licensed judicial interpreter and a longstanding member of the professional language services community, who is currently being detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Texas.

Ms. Batra is not only a highly respected professional, but she is also a woman whose life story exemplifies the promise of American justice. A Sikh immigrant from India, she fled to the United States over 35 years ago after her parents were murdered in the state-sponsored anti-Sikh pogroms of the 1980s. She rebuilt her life here, settled in Laguna Heights, Texas, raised her family, and dedicated her career to the very legal system that gave her refuge. She is the only licensed court interpreter in the state of Texas for Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu, languages spoken by tens of thousands of people navigating the American legal system. One of her children recently enlisted in the United States military. She has lived legally in the United States for more than three decades, with no criminal record to speak of.

On March 17, Ms. Batra was detained by plainclothes ICE agents at Harlingen International Airport while en route to Wisconsin to interpret in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin.

Ms. Batra holds a recognized legal immigration status known as *withholding of removal*, a protection granted by a U.S. immigration judge that recognizes she cannot be safely returned to her country of origin. Her work authorization, renewed regularly and in full compliance with U.S. law, was valid for another four years at the time of her arrest. She is authorized to live and work in the United States and is a vetted professional with decades of service to the state and federal courts, which makes her detention inexplicable and troubling.

The implications of this detention extend far beyond this individual case:

The detention of an authorized officer of the court sends a message to individuals with limited English proficiency. Victims, witnesses, and defendants may avoid interaction with the justice system for fear of being detained. This erodes the trust necessary for public safety and due process.

Interpreters are the linguistic backbone of our courts. Without them, equitable justice becomes inaccessible. Ms. Batra has dedicated her career to strengthening the very system now targeting her. Her detention sends a message to language professionals nationwide that service to the courts is no protection against arbitrary detention. Qualified interpreters may start to refuse travel assignments and government contracts, hindering justice in our courts.

By detaining a federally contracted court interpreter, the government has directly compromised the operational capacity of the federal judiciary. Courts are obligated to provide qualified language access to individuals with limited English proficiency, an obligation rooted in the Court Interpreters Act and the due process guarantees of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments. Every single day Ms. Batra remains in custody is a day that obligation is compromised.

We strongly and respectfully call for an immediate review of her case to uphold her immigration status and for her prompt release. Ms. Batra is not a threat to public safety. She is not an unlawful resident. She is not a flight risk. She is a pillar of the communities she has served, a fact attested to by judges, elected officials, and the very courts across the country that have contracted her services for decades.

Sincerely,

American Translators Association (ATA)

National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT)

American Association of Interpreters and Translators in Education (AAITE)

Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI)

National Council on Interpreting in Healthcare (NCIHC)