



The Department of Homeland Security logo is seen during a news conference in Washington, Feb. 25, 2015. (AP/Pablo Martinez Monsivais, File)

Michael Kunzelman

[View Author Profile](#)

Lindsay Whitehurst

[View Author Profile](#)

Associated Press

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Greenbelt, Md. — February 25, 2025

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A federal judge on Monday blocked immigration agents from conducting enforcement operations in houses of worship for [Quakers](#) and a handful of other religious groups.

U.S. District Judge Theodore Chang found that the Trump administration policy could violate their religious freedom and should be blocked while a lawsuit challenging it plays out.

The preliminary injunction from the Maryland-based judge only applies to the plaintiffs, which also include a Georgia-based network of Baptist churches and a [Sikh](#) temple in California.

They sued after [the Trump administration](#) threw out Department of Homeland Security policies limiting where migrant arrests could happen as President [Donald Trump](#) seeks to make good on campaign promises to carry out mass deportations.

The policy change said field agents using "common sense" and "discretion" can conduct immigration enforcement operations at houses of worship without a supervisor's approval.

Plaintiffs' attorneys argue that the new DHS directive departs from the government's 30-year-old policy against staging immigration enforcement operations in "protected areas" or "sensitive locations."

A coalition of Quaker meetings from states including Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Virginia sued DHS and its secretary, [Kristi Noem](#), on Jan. 27, less than a week after the new policy was announced.

Many immigrants are afraid to attend religious services while the government enforces the new rule, lawyers for the congregations said in [a court filing](#).

"It's a fear that people are experiencing across the county," plaintiffs' attorney Bradley Girard told the judge during a February hearing. "People are not showing up, and the plaintiffs are suffering as a result."

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Government lawyers [claim the plaintiffs](#) are asking the court to interfere with law-enforcement activities based on mere speculation.

"Plaintiffs have provided no evidence indicating that any of their religious organizations have been targeted," Justice Department attorney Kristina Wolfe told the judge, who was appointed by President Barack Obama.

More than two dozen Christian and Jewish groups representing millions of Americans have also filed [a similar but separate lawsuit](#) in Washington, D.C.

Plaintiffs in the Maryland case are represented by the Democracy Forward Foundation, whose lawyers asked the judge to block DHS enforcement of the policy on a nationwide basis.

"DHS's new policy gives it the authority to enter any house of worship across the country, no matter its religious beliefs," the attorneys wrote.

Government lawyers say immigration enforcement activities have been allowed in sensitive places, including houses of worship, for decades. The only change in the policy is that a supervisor's approval is no longer mandatory, they added.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. [View the full series.](#)