


On May 4, 2025, NYYM held a virtual program facilitated by [Frederick Dettmer](#) on how to respond if Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents or other government authorities come to your Meeting intending to find and arrest undocumented persons. The program covered our rights and obligations, what to document, how to best secure the Meetinghouse, etc. Below are some action items from the program. The entire program, including helpful legal documents and sample signs, statements, etc., to be printed or referenced, can be found here:  [Know Your Meeting's Rights Full Program 2025-05-06.pdf](#)

KNOW YOUR MEETING'S RIGHTS: WHEN GOVERNMENT AGENTS KNOCK AT THE DOOR

Background: In February 2025 New York Yearly Meeting (and other area yearly meetings) was part of a lawsuit vs. the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regarding the ability of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to conduct enforcement actions in our meetinghouses. A judge granted us a Preliminary Injunction that requires DHS and ICE to continue to follow the guidelines set forth in the Mayorkas Memo (which protects “sensitive sites” from ICE enforcement actions), and to NOT follow the guidelines in the newer Huffman Memo (which allows ICE agents to “use their own judgement” about where to conduct their actions.)

See the [Full Program PDF](#) for summaries and copies of the injunction and samples of other signs and documents. Meetings may wish to have a printed copy on hand in case government agents do show up; see *Visit Response Plan*, below.

What this means:

1. In dealing with Friends' houses of worship in New York Yearly Meeting the Department of Homeland Security is supposed to follow the rules specified in the Mayorkas Memo that significantly restrict Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) enforcement activities “in or near” meetings or churches.
2. Those rules make it unlikely that a meeting or church covered by the Preliminary Injunction will be visited by government agents in search of “aliens,” except:
 - If the meeting or church is actively engaged in breaking the law (civil disobedience)
 - In aid of an alien (undocumented migrant/refugee seeker).
 - If DHS ignores the Court or interprets the Preliminary Injunction “creatively”.

Preparing for a Visit From the Government

Meetings can take these steps to prepare for an interaction with government agents.

1. Educate the Body:

Make sure EVERYONE knows, understands and agrees to follow the guidelines and the advice on what to do if the Meeting is visited by government agents [see the next section, the *Visit Response Plan*). Consider a formal training/education program.

2. Backup Valuable Records:

Consider what records, documents, and equipment might be seized by the government and how that would affect the Meeting.

- If government agents **seize the Meeting's computers, books, records** and other documents, how will the Meeting continue to function?
- Are there **documents (or electronic data) that should be retained only off-site**, if at all?
- Does the Meeting want to **change its practices for documenting proceedings, decisions and policies**?

3. Define the Meeting's Public Space

Refer to the sample *Public and Private Spaces Policy*, **appendix 4** in the [Full PDF](#).

Creating a policy involves designating where (and when) spaces in the meetinghouse are open to the public. You will want to:

- a. **Limit entry points** into the Meetinghouse.
- b. **Clearly identify the areas** in the Meeting where visitors are welcome and not welcome.
- c. **Limit access to restricted areas.**

4. Post signs about the meeting's open hours, public/private space, and expectations. **All entry points should have signs posted that:**

- a. Identify the property as a **house of worship and "private property"**;
- b. Identify **hours** that the Meeting is open to visitors (ie, public);

- c. Advise visitors of the **Meeting's expectations** [*"No weapons allowed"*] and important practices [*"Please enter in silence"*]

*For sample private property signs in English and Spanish, see **Appendix 5** in the [Full Program PDF](#).*

5. Identify Important Contacts:

- a. Who in the Meeting will **take charge** of dealing with visiting government agents?
- b. Who will **record** the encounter?
- c. Who will prepare a **report** of the event?
- d. Who has agreed to serve as the Meeting's **legal counsel**; who will **contact** that person/firm?
- e. Other persons who can provide **emergency assistance**?

To-Do Checklist:

- ☐ Prepare a **comprehensive outline** of these guidelines & the Visit Response Plan.
- ☐ **Share it widely.**
- ☐ **Post it** in multiple appropriate places in the Meeting (entry ways, business office, message board, etc.).

Sanctuary and Civil Disobedience

Information and queries for meetings that are considering civil disobedience.

- Federal criminal law makes it **a crime to knowingly “harbor” undocumented immigrants.**
- Has the Meeting discerned where it draws the line between **compliance** with laws and government agents and when their demands **unacceptably infringe on our religious faith and practice?**
- Has the Meeting made adequate preparations for dealing with the **possible consequences of not complying with laws or government agents?**

If someone is seized and detained:

- If a person is taken away by the visiting government agents, try to get information about **why and where the person is being taken.**
- Does the detained person have any **immediate needs** that the Meeting can address (medications, etc.)?
- Designate someone who will **contact family, counsel, close friends** and other emergency contacts
- Designate someone who will **take care of the person’s children** if present at the Meeting
- Discern: what is the Meeting prepared to do to **support the seized person(s) and their family?**

VISIT RESPONSE PLAN

Answering the Knock on the Door

1. DO NOT OPEN THE DOOR.
2. **Stay calm** and **polite**.
3. Remember **your rights** and the **Meeting's rights**:
 - a. **Right to remain silent** (5th Amendment). YOU DO NOT HAVE TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS OR OTHERWISE SPEAK WITH THE GOVERNMENT AGENTS.
 - b. **Right to Due Process** (5th Amend).
 - c. **Right to be secure against unreasonable searches and seizures** (4th Amend).
 - d. Meetings' and churches' **constitutional privileges** (1st Amend, Religious Freedom Restoration Act).
4. Ask visitors to **identify themselves** (name, employer/agency, rank, ID #) and to slip any **papers relating to their visit** (warrant, subpoena, etc.) under the door so you can examine them BEFORE PROVIDING ENTRY.
5. Carefully and fully review the papers, noting their **scope and limits**:
 - a. An "**arrest warrant**" is not a judicial warrant unless it is signed by a Judge.
 - b. Any warrant must contain a **signature** and be **accurate** in identifying location (name and address), specific areas within location to be investigated, specific documents (or categories) being sought, persons being sought, and purpose of search.
 - c. If the warrant fails any of these criteria, **identify errors** to visitors and **decline to permit entry** until counsel is consulted and/or an accurate document is presented.
6. Request opportunity to **review the warrant** [or other documents presented by the visitors] **with counsel** before providing admission.
7. Remember that **government agents lie**.

8. Request that visitors remove and leave outside the building any **weapons, masks** and other inappropriate things before entering the Meetinghouse. [This can be an opportunity to remind visitors of the nature of the place they are visiting.]
9. If visitors enter Meetinghouse or private spaces **without permission or legal right**, advise them that they are **violating the Meeting's rights** but **do not resist or obstruct** them. **Make a record.**
10. Have copies of the **Preliminary Injunction Order & Mayorkas Memo** available and hand one to each visitor, with a statement that: *"I wish to advise you that you are required to comply with this Preliminary Injunction Order and Mayorkas Memo in conducting any activity in or near the Meetinghouse."*

Know Your Rights

Right to Remain Silent and to Preserve Confidences:

1. Remember you are **not required to answer** any questions or provide any information or guidance.
2. Insist on **having counsel present** before answering any questions.
3. **Do not identify** for the government agents persons who may be of foreign background or any personal information about **anyone**.
4. **Do not respond** to inquiries about whether particular individuals are present or have been seen at the Meeting (now or in the past).
5. Remember that **government agents lie**. Set aside your urge to trust and don't let yourself be captured by the tale being told. [*"We're just here to make sure the place is safe."* *"We have intelligence that. . ."* *"You are required to."*]

Public vs Private Spaces:

1. Areas used for public services are considered "public spaces" **during their operating hours**.
2. Identify and **post notices** restricting access to other areas: "**private spaces**".

3. Government agents can **enter public spaces** without a warrant and can exercise an “administrative warrant” in those areas.
4. Government agents **must have a “judicial warrant”** [or your **consent**] in order to enter **private spaces**.

Warrants:

There are 2 different types of warrants that government agents may display:

1. “**Judicial warrants**” are signed (issued) by a federal or state court judge and indicate that they are from a specific court. Judicial warrants (or consent) are required for government agents to enter private spaces.
2. “**Administrative warrants**” can be issued by government agents, themselves, and indicate they are from DHS or another branch/agency.

Request opportunity **to review the warrant [or other documents presented by the visitors] with counsel** before providing admission or responses.

Samples of a “Judicial Warrant” and an “Administrative Warrant” are annexed as Appendix 7 in the [Full Program PDF](#).

Accompany, Demonstrate Our Faith and Engage:

You are entitled to **observe**, without interfering in, the government agents’ actions.

1. **Sit (or stand) in corporate worship during the visit.** The Meeting can **remind** the government agents of where they are and what they are doing to people of faith by worshipping in their midst.
2. You can attempt to **engage** the government agents in Friendly conversation without getting agitated, hostile, disruptive or interfering.
3. Engage with **a government agent who simply shows up as a “visitor”** during the Meeting’s proceedings. Remind them that they are in a religious space where active worship is going on (even if in silence); invite them to participate; let them know that they are not welcome to conduct investigatory, interrogatory, apprehension activities during worship.

Documentation:

1. **Record** the event.
2. Make a detailed **report** of everything relating to the visit, including a list of items taken and persons present.
3. Encourage **wide participation** in preparing the report.
4. **Share the report** with the Meeting, counsel, immigration rights organizations.
5. Remember that the report is NOT CONFIDENTIAL.

After the Visit:

1. **Advise counsel.**
2. Complete **report preparation** process.
3. Consider whether Meeting's or individual's **rights appear to have been violated** and, if so, what action (if any) should be taken.
4. Consider **publicizing the event**.