
Border Patrol Thieves? US Border Agents Stealing from Refugees

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U.S. border patrol agents have been stripping Mexican immigrants of their possessions, including large amounts of cash and their personal identification and other legal papers, before deporting them back to Mexico, according to complaints filed Wednesday by various rights groups.

The American Civil Liberties Union of New Mexico and a coalition of other organizations filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security indicating 26 cases of border patrol agents allegedly stealing from immigrants. The complaints also stated that some of the deportees were sent to cities in Mexico where they knew no one.

"Deporting people without their personal belongings isn't just wrong, it's cruel," said Vicki B. Gaubeca, director of the ACLU of New Mexico Regional Center for Border Rights in Las Cruces. "Imagine being abandoned a thousand miles from home without money, ID, or a cell phone. We as Americans need to stop the wholesale robbery of people, and start treating noncitizens with the same dignity and humanity that we would want for ourselves."

Among some of the stated cases include one 23-year old man from Chihuahua, Mexico, who was caught by U.S. Border Patrol agents while walking on a road in New Mexico and forced to sign a form abandoning his rights to his belongings. According to the young man, he did not understand the form nor did the agents properly explain it.

Another case states that Border Patrol agents seized \$400 from a 23-year-old woman from Guerrero when she was detained in Texas, which was the young woman's life savings.

According to the human rights organizations, seizing these items from refugees and undocumented migrants before deporting them puts them at greater risk of harm.

"They are really eroding the rule of law at the border," said Kristin Greer, attorney with the ACLU of New Mexico. "They are putting people at great vulnerability."

A spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security, Gillian Christensen, did not deny the allegations but said that Homeland Security “has strict standards in place to ensure that detainees’ personal property is safeguarded.”

She also added that, “Any allegation of missing property will be thoroughly investigated.”

U.S. officials have increased their aggressions against undocumented migrants in the country this year, with immigration officials carrying out mass raids and deportations of undocumented Mexican and Central Americans since January.

Thousands have already been sent back to their home countries this year alone, many of whom were fleeing situations of poverty or extreme violence.
