

'I feel totally traumatized': Unaccompanied minors from Guatemala describe attempted deportation

A judge blocked the deportations of 76 Guatemalan minors over the weekend.

By [Laura Romero](#)

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Judge blocks deportation of 76 Guatemalan minors A federal judge has blocked the Trump administration from deporting 76 unaccompanied Guatemalan children from the United States to Guatemala.

On a Saturday night, staff members at a Texas legal services organization say they watched as dozens of Guatemalan children were pulled from their beds at shelters and taken to an airport in the early morning hours to be removed from the U.S. One young girl was so scared that she threw up, according to a staff member.

These events were part of an apparently chaotic scene over Labor Day weekend as the Trump administration attempted to deport 76 unaccompanied Guatemalan children.

Declarations filed on Wednesday by attorneys, advocates and the children themselves provide a detailed account of what the minors say they experienced. The new court filings also describe what some families in Guatemala say they were told about the planned deportations.

The removal of the unaccompanied minors was temporarily [blocked on Sunday by a federal judge](#) just as the children were sitting on the planes. Attorneys representing the children moved to file a preliminary injunction on Wednesday, arguing that the minors remain at risk of being sent to Guatemala without a final order from an immigration judge.

At a hearing over the weekend, a Department of Justice attorney argued that the Trump administration was removing the children in accordance with the law and at the request of the Guatemalan government and the legal guardians of the children.



In this Aug. 31, 2025, file photo, planes used for deportation flights sit at the Valley International Airport, in Harlingen, Texas.

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Trump administration "border czar" Tom Homan, speaking to reporters from the White House on Wednesday, called the judge's decision halting the deportation "disgusting," dismissing claims from the children's attorneys that some of them did not want return to Guatemala and could face harm if they did.

"For four years, I heard nothing except family separation...now we're trying to reunite families and they are fighting us on that," Homan said.

In a sworn declaration, a 16-year-old from Guatemala, whose name was redacted, said they went to sleep Saturday "as normal" but were woken up by shelter staff in the middle of the night. They were told that all the Guatemalan children had to be returned to their home country.

"At around 2:30 a.m., I called my mother to tell her I might be deported to Guatemala," the teen said. "My mom started crying. She said that we could only trust in God. She had no idea that the government had a plan to return me."

The teen, who said they arrived in the U.S. after their sister was murdered in Guatemala last March, is in immigration proceedings and has a hearing scheduled for later this month before an immigration judge, according to the filings.

"When I was packing up my personal belongings, I was thinking about everything that could happen to me with all the crime in Guatemala. I was worried that I would be killed," the 16-year-old said.

The teen said that at around 4 a.m., the legal director of the shelter was notified that a judge had issued an order, blocking the deportations.



Shackled migrants board a transport van after getting off a plane at the Valley International Airport, Aug. 31, 2025, in Harlingen, Texas.

Michael Gonzalez/AP

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"The impact is real," the minor said. "I feel totally traumatized. I don't even know how to explain it."

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A 17-year-old in Texas, who is also in immigration proceedings, said they woke up at around 2 a.m. on Sunday.

"I felt like I lost my breath for a second because they had never woken us up in the middle of the night before," the 17-year-old said. "The supervisor told me we were going to leave and to get our things."

The 17-year-old said they were put on a bus and taken to an airport. When officers checked the list of names, they notified the minor that they weren't on the deportation list.

"I got scared they would still try to take me back to Guatemala later that night," the minor said.

Father says daughter should remain in US

The declarations submitted by the attorneys representing the Guatemalan minors included statements from some of the parents in Guatemala, who said they never asked for their children to be returned to their home country.

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Rudy Anibal Tiul Cucul, the father of a minor who arrived in the U.S. in January 2023, said he received a call on Aug. 15 from a person notifying him that his daughter was going to be sent to Guatemala.

"We never asked for [my daughter] to be sent back to Guatemala," Cucul said. "To my understanding, my daughter has the support of an attorney and she has a pending petition for asylum. She should remain in the United States so that she can have her case heard."

Lauren Flores, the legal director of the South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project (ProBar), said in a declaration that when she arrived at the airport in Harlingen, Texas, on Sunday morning, she saw two Immigration and Customs Enforcement planes parked on the tarmac.

"The stairs had already been pulled away and the door to the plane, which I had been informed had the children on board, was already closed," Flores said. "I went to the building at the tarmac. I could see officers inside. I told the young man who answered the door that I was an attorney, that I had clients on the plane, and that I had a court order stopping the plane from leaving."

Flores said she saw agents laugh as she repeatedly told them that they "were all complicit in the violation of the judge's order."

In another declaration, a 15-year-old from Guatemala said they fled to the U.S. in January on their own without a parent because of gangs and violence. The minor said a week and a half ago, some immigration agents visited their foster care program and asked the minor if they had family in their home country.

"The agents didn't ask me if I was afraid to go back to Guatemala ... or what would happen to me if I had to go back to Guatemala," the minor said.

ABC News' Selina Wang contributed to this report.

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