

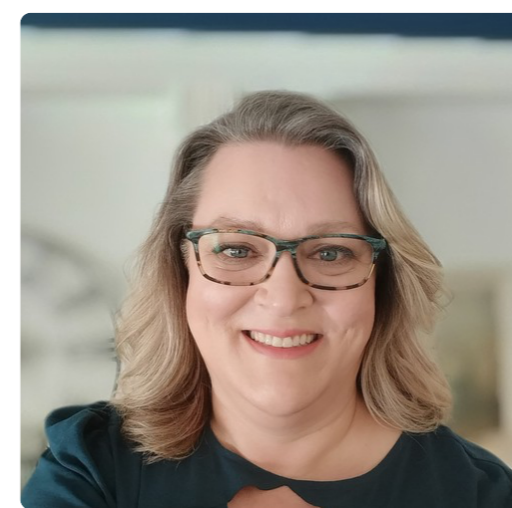
# Letter from the President

January 31, 2026

## Immigration Enforcement and PTAs

### Dear PTA Leaders,

This is one of the most complicated and sobering letters I've ever written. The outrage, fear and uncertainty caused by the immigration enforcement actions of the past several months and most recently, the tragedies unfolding in Minneapolis, as well as increased activities in our state, raise questions we've not had to consider before. Our children are fearful of going to and coming home from school, not knowing what may happen to them or their friends on any given day. These events are harming not just their education, but their mental health and overall well-being – everything we try to improve in PTA.



As you may know, at our 2025 Legislative Assembly, delegates passed resolution 18.51 [Rights and Services for Immigrant Families, Children, and Youth](#), that all of us can use to guide our advocacy. Please take a moment to read through this important resolution.

Be sure to contact your state and federal legislators and use the strength of our numbers and your personal stories to make our voices heard – loudly! Sign up for Action Alerts from [Washington State PTA](#) and from [National PTA](#). These alerts are time sensitive and targeted at influencing our state and federal legislators.

I know many of you want to mobilize locally and protect your communities. I understand the desire for clear answers and step-by-step instructions. Unfortunately, WSPTA can't give you those absolute instructions or guarantees. The speed at which things are progressing and the disregard for the rights and protections many have taken for granted, see us in uncharted waters. Please remember WSPTA is not legal counsel, and your PTA may want to talk with legal counsel and your insurance provider before pursuing different courses of action.

In consultation with National PTA, here's the guidance WSPTA has been able to put together as of January 29, 2026:

- Remember, all PTAs are nonpartisan. So, be careful in involving your PTA in activities that could jeopardize your organization's nonprofit status such as circulating any materials, supplies, and advertisements for organizations that could be perceived as partisan or collaborating with partisan organizations.
- Be sure to have a conversation with your school and district administrators about what to do if immigration enforcement agents are on school property. At this point, all districts should have a policy and procedures in place for how to respond if immigration enforcement agents are on school property during school hours. School district policies and procedures should align with the guidelines provided by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. If your district does not have procedures or guidelines to follow for after-school events on school property, then I encourage you to work with them to create a plan.
- If immigration enforcement agents were to appear during a PTA event on school property (outside of school hours), and there is a building administrator on site, ask for their help as they may need to follow the district's plan.
- The question WSPTA gets about immigration enforcement agents appearing during a PTA event after school hours on school grounds is made more complicated because we've learned that there are different definitions about what is considered a "public space." I suggest you refer to the document created by the Washington State Attorney General's office detailing what you can do if an immigration enforcement officer approaches you. These instructions give examples of different situations. Here is an excerpt from the [Attorney General's website](#):
  - You can ask them to leave.** If immigration officers enter a private space and do not have a court order or warrant signed by a judge (see [Immigration Enforcement Document Samples](#)), you can ask them to step outside and let them know you **do not consent to a search**.
    - In the workplace, they may not enter areas reserved for employees without permission.
    - At schools, they may not access areas that are not open to the general public, such as classrooms, private offices, and residence halls without permission.
    - On private transportation or within businesses that restrict access to their customers, immigration enforcement officials do not have to be admitted entry without consent or permission.

According to the document on the Attorney General's site, you do not have to provide information about families, students, or events. Remember PTA volunteers do not have the authority to speak on behalf of the school or district. Stay calm and be as safe as possible.

What CAN you do as a PTA? Here are some steps you can take now (links posted at the end of the letter):

- Share "Know Your Rights" information with families
- Share resources for immigrant families from trusted community organizations or the school district
- Ask your school district about their procedures in response to immigration enforcement actions or the suspected presence of immigration enforcement agents near the school
- Ask your school if they have received information and training on responses to the presence of immigration enforcement agents on school property
- Contact your legislators to ask them to protect the rights of immigrant families and maintain their access to education, food, and healthcare

I know this may seem limiting when you are seeing children you know, neighbors, friends and your community harmed and just want to help. It's always important that you connect with the communities you are trying to help, so you know what their needs are. And before taking action, take time to consider whether what you are doing can add to panic in the community or perhaps unintentionally harm families and volunteers.

These guidelines are for PTAs as an organization. PTA leaders and members are able to act in *individual* capacities to participate freely in the democratic process and collaborate with more partisan organizations. If you are participating in an activity that could jeopardize your PTA and limit your abilities to serve your school community in the future, care must be taken to ensure that there is no misunderstanding about whether you are acting as the representative of a PTA or as an individual.

While under the umbrella of PTA, we can use our strength and collective voices to get decision makers in our state and nation's capital listening and working for us. Remember, even if you haven't had great responses in the past, we are playing a long game with our advocacy. Every time you contact someone, it is another weight added to tip the scales towards students. Let's do what we do best – share information to inform, educate and connect our communities, *so that every child can thrive and reach their full potential!*

Serving with you,  
 Tori Emerson, Washington State PTA President

*This list of resource links is not intended as legal advice. Please contact an attorney with any legal questions.*

#### Links to Resources:

Immigrant Resource Center: <https://www.ilrc.org/community-resources/know-your-rights>  
 Northwest Immigrant Rights Project: <https://nwirp.org/resources/kyr/>  
 OSPI <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/equity-and-civil-rights/immigrant-students-rights-attend-public-schools>  
 OSPI January 2025 guidance to schools: <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2025-01/protections-immigrant-students-washington-public-schools.pdf>  
 Washington State Attorney General: <https://www.atg.wa.gov/know-your-rights-civil-immigration-enforcement-washington>  
 Immigrant Safety Plan for Youth and Children (LCYC working with DCYF): <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/533dcf7ce4b0f92a7a64292e/t/67a3a7a0739586096f2e67ba/1738778531988/2025+Immigrant+Safety+Plan+for+Youth+and+Children.pdf>

**Tori Emerson, WSPTA President**

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