Re: Legal Rights of Immigrant Students in Florida Schools and Schools' Obligations to Protect Those Rights

#### Dear Superintendent:

We at the ACLU of Florida have heard concerns from many educators, school administrators, and parents about how recent changes in immigration enforcement practices will affect their schools, and ultimately their children's education. It is important that your schools have procedures in place to ensure that they meet their legal obligations while maintaining safe learning environments for all students. We are writing to provide you with answers to some common questions and tools to help you fulfill this duty.<sup>1</sup>

While these changes increase the risk that immigration enforcement operations will occur at schools, nothing has changed as to whether schools must, *or even can*, consistent with law, allow immigration agents to enter schools, inspect records, or engage with students and staff. Likewise, schools continue to be prohibited from discriminating against students and their families or otherwise limiting access to education on the basis of immigration status. For example, requiring federally issued identification records for students to enroll in school or for guardians to pick up students from school would not be permitted under Florida law.<sup>2</sup>

For decades, in recognition of the sensitivity of schools and other locations where people get their basic needs met, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) maintained a policy of avoiding taking immigration enforcement actions at such sensitive areas.<sup>3</sup> As the U.S. Supreme Court has

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This letter should not be construed as legal advice, but rather as a recommendation that you seek legal guidance promptly relative to issues in this letter. The law in this area is complex and every situation is different.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See State and Federal Laws Protect Students, Regardless of Their Immigration Status *infra* at 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Guidelines for Enforcement Actions in or Near Protected Areas, <a href="https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/21">https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/21</a> <a href="https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/file

explained, "directing the onus of a parent's misconduct against his children does not comport with fundamental conceptions of justice." On January 21, 2025, the "sensitive locations" policy was rescinded, indicating that ICE and CBP will no longer avoid targeting schools for immigration enforcement actions. Florida, meanwhile, has passed laws requiring local law enforcement agencies to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement authorities and investing state resources in immigration enforcement.<sup>5</sup>

These developments, however, do not change state or federal laws that guarantee all children the right to a safe, high-quality education, regardless of their immigration status. Schools have legal responsibilities to ensure their students' rights, and they have the right to manage their own property. Schools can be held liable for failing to take appropriate measures to protect their students' rights.

To prepare for the increased likelihood that immigration enforcement operations will impact schools, it is critically important to understand both students' rights and schools' responsibilities, and to have policies and procedures in place for responding to immigration enforcement inquiries.

# STATE AND FEDERAL LAWS PROHIBIT SCHOOLS FROM IMPAIRING OR DETERRING ACCESS TO EDUCATION OR SHARING STUDENT RECORDS, REGARDLESS OF STUDENTS' IMMIGRATION STATUS

Florida and Federal laws prohibit discrimination in education programs that receive state or federal funding, including discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin.<sup>6</sup> Schools that receive federal funding are specifically prohibited from using "criteria or methods of administration" which have the effect of subjecting individuals to such discrimination or have the effect of "defeating or substantially impairing accomplishment of the objectives of the program for individuals of a particular race, color, or national origin."<sup>7</sup>

Service, May 17, 1993, <a href="http://library.niwap.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/IMM-Memo-SensLocationsEnforce.pdf">http://library.niwap.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/IMM-Memo-SensLocationsEnforce.pdf</a>.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Plyler v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202, 220 (1982).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Ch. 25-1, Laws of Fla.; Ch. 25-2, Laws of Fla.; Ch. 23-40, Laws of Fla.; Ch. 22-193, Laws of Fla.; Ch. 19-102, Laws of Fla.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000c-6 (public elementary and secondary education); Title VI, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d (recipients of federal funds); Fla. Stat. § 1000.05(2)(a) (2025) (recipients of state or federal funds).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 42.104(B)(2); 34 C.F.R. § 100.3(b)(2); see also U.S. Dep't of Educ., Office for Civil Rights & Office of the General Counsel, U.S. Dep't of Just., Civil Rights Div., Dear Colleague Letter: School Enrollment Procedures 1 (May 8, 2014), <a href="https://www.aclumich.org/sites/default/files/doj\_doe\_dear\_colleague\_letter.pdf">https://www.aclumich.org/sites/default/files/doj\_doe\_dear\_colleague\_letter.pdf</a>.

In the landmark case *Plyler v. Doe*,<sup>8</sup> the U.S. Supreme Court held that the Constitution forbids discrimination on the basis of immigration status regarding access to public education. As the Court explained, denying access to education "imposes a lifetime hardship on a discrete class of children not accountable for their disabling status." As the Eleventh Circuit noted, "[a]n increased likelihood of deportation or harassment upon enrollment in school significantly deters undocumented children from enrolling in and attending school, in contravention of their rights under *Plyler*." The psychological impact of students being subject to interrogation by immigration enforcement agents at school may similarly implicate equal protection concerns. 11



Additionally, Florida's constitution is explicit: "all children residing within its borders" are to be provided a "uniform, efficient, safe, secure, and high quality system of free public schools that allows students to obtain a high quality education." Every child residing in Florida between the ages of six and fifteen not only has a right to, but is legally required to attend school, regardless of their immigration status. It is the schools' responsibility to maintain a safe and secure learning environment for students. It

Schools in Florida are specifically prohibited from referring students to immigration authorities or otherwise inquiring into students' or their parents' immigration status. <sup>15</sup> Schools are within their authority to require immigration enforcement agents to present a valid judicial warrant to gain access to students or private areas of campus.

Parents have the right to direct the upbringing, education, health care, and mental health of their children. <sup>16</sup> "The fundamental liberty interest in parenting is protected by both the Florida and federal constitutions.

<sup>8 457</sup> U.S. 202 (1982).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 223.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Hisp. Int. Coal. of Ala. v. Governor of Ala., 691 F.3d 1236, 1247 (11th Cir. 2012).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> See Brown v. Bd. of Ed. of Topeka, Shawnee Cnty., Kan., 347 U.S. 483, 494 (1955) (discussing "intangible considerations," including psychological impacts in equal protection analysis).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Fla. Const. art. IX, § 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1003.21(1)(a)(1).

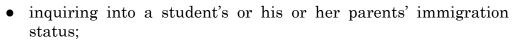
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1006.07.

League of United Latin Am. Citizens (LULAC) et al. vs. Fla. Bd. of Ed., et al., Consent Decree, No. 90-1913 (S.D. Fla. Aug. 13, 1990), available at <a href="https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7582/urlt/Consent-Decree.pdf">https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7582/urlt/Consent-Decree.pdf</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1014.03.

In Florida, it is specifically protected by our privacy provision."<sup>17</sup> These rights are not contingent on immigration status, 18 nor do they "evaporate simply because [parents] have not been model parents." 19

In Florida, the law further recognizes the collaborative role parents play in each student's education, recognizing parental rights regarding education.<sup>20</sup> This role is also not contingent upon immigration status, as illustrated by the consent decree in the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) et al. vs. Florida Board of Education et al. ("Consent Decree"), which further protects the rights of immigrant students and their families.<sup>21</sup> To ensure equal access for immigrant students, it prohibits referring or reporting prospective or current students to federal immigration enforcement for any reason.<sup>22</sup> It also requires that parents be invited to participate in limited English proficiency committee meetings and programming to inform their children's education. Also, relevant here, the decree prohibits districts from:



- eliciting, compiling, or maintaining lists of students with and alien without registration numbers (an immigration identification number); and
- from eliciting, compiling, or maintaining personally identifiable data of any students' immigration status.<sup>23</sup>

### THE CONSTITUTION LIMITS IMMIGRATION AGENTS' AUTHORITY TO ENTER SCHOOLS OR TO REMOVE STUDENTS FOR INTERROGATION

The Fourth Amendment prohibits law enforcement officials from entering a space where a person has a "reasonable expectation of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Beagle v. Beagle, 678 So. 2d 1271, 1275 (Fla. 1996); see also Glob. Travel Mktg., Inc. v. Shea, 908 So. 2d 392, 398 (Fla. 2005) (explaining that parental decision-making authority is rooted in the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the privacy clause in article I, section 23 of the Florida Constitution).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> See Plyler, 457 U.S. at 210 (citing cases illustrating that immigrants, including those in the country unlawfully, are guaranteed due process of the law by the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments); Zadvydas v. Davis, 533 U.S. 678, 693–94 (2001); In re Doe, 281 P.3d 95 (Idaho 2012) (deported father retained parental rights); In re E.N.C., et al. 384 S.W.3d 796 (Tex. 2010) (deported father retained parental rights); In re Interest of Angelica L., 767 N.W.2d 74 (Neb. 2009) (deportation does not remove parental rights).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> J.B. v. Fla. Dep't of Child. & Fam. Servs., 768 So. 2d 1060, 1064 (Fla. 2000), quoting Santosky v. Kramer, 455 U.S. 745, 753 (1982).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1002.20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> LULAC, Consent Decree, supra at n.15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> *Id*.

privacy," such as areas of your schools that are not open to the public, $^{24}$  to apprehend them without a valid judicial warrant or consent, absent exigent circumstances. $^{25}$  This applies to schools $^{26}$  and protects students regardless of their immigration status. $^{27}$ 

If immigration agents arrive at your school with a *valid judicial warrant*, you must comply with the terms of the warrant. However, it is unlikely that immigration agents will have a valid judicial warrant. Instead, immigration agents often rely on administrative warrants, which are not signed by judges and do not authorize nonconsensual entry to non-public areas.<sup>28</sup> It is important to have procedures in place that ensure that your district's counsel reviews any documents presented by immigration agents before school staff acts.

We recommend that schools adopt policies requiring valid judicial warrants before granting law enforcement, including immigration enforcement, access to non-public areas of the school or students. Many such policies have been adopted throughout the country and have been recommended by national associations of principals and school superintendents.<sup>29</sup>

You may have heard about Florida's anti-sanctuary city law, which was recently amended. This law does not prevent schools from adopting policies of requiring valid judicial warrants to access



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1006.07(6)(f)3; Rule: 6A-1.0018, F.A.C. (Schools are required to keep campuses, buildings, and classrooms secured, with gates and doors locked and only authorized visitors, students and school personnel given access.).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> See, e.g., O'Rourke v. Hayes, 378 F.3d 1201, 1206 (11th Cir. 2004) (Officers not entitled to qualified immunity where evidence showed they entered office against office manager's will in effort to execute warrant for arrest.); Terry v. Ohio, 392 U.S. 1, 9 (1968). See <a href="https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/fourth\_amendment">https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/fourth\_amendment</a> ("Exigent circumstances exist in situations where...people are in imminent danger, where evidence faces imminent destruction, or prior to a suspect's imminent escape.").

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> New Jersey v. T.L.O., 469 U.S. 325, 337 (1985); see also State v. D.S., 685 So. 2d 41, 43 (Fla. 3d DCA 1996) (explaining searches initiated by outside police officers or at their request require probable cause); Elson v. State, 688 So. 2d 465, 466 (Fla. 1st DCA 1997) ("When a law enforcement officer directs, participates, or acquiesces in a search conducted by private parties, that search must comport with usual constitutional standards.").

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> See Zadvydas, 533 U.S. at 679.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Kidd v. Mayorkas, 734 F. Supp. 3d 967, 979–80 (C.D. Cal. 2024).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Immigration Supports for School Leaders, The School Superintendents Association (Jan. 22, 2025), <a href="https://www.aasa.org/resources/resource/immigration-supports-for-school-leaders">https://www.aasa.org/resources/resource/immigration-supports-for-school-leaders</a>; <a href="Undocumented Students">Undocumented Students</a>, <a href="National Association">National Association</a>/
position-statements/undocumented-students/
(last visited Feb. 13, 2025); Lynn Rossi Scott & Mark Page, <a href="A New ICE Age in Federal Immigration Law Enforcement">National Association of Elementary School Principals</a> (Jan. 29, 2025), <a href="https://www.naesp.org/blog/a-new-ice-age-in-federal-immigration-law-enforcement/">https://www.naesp.org/blog/a-new-ice-age-in-federal-immigration-law-enforcement/</a>.

nonpublic areas or students. In fact, it specifically excludes educational records from required information sharing.<sup>30</sup> Nor does this law suspend students' rights; Florida's anti-sanctuary city law must be read within the confines of students' rights to privacy, equal protection, and education. For example, courts have explained that immigration searches and arrests are bound by the limitations of the Fourth Amendment, even when performed under a federal statute authorizing certain actions without a warrant.<sup>31</sup>

Requiring a valid judicial warrant before granting access to non-public areas or students ensures that students' rights, including their right to privacy, right to a public education, and to be free from unlawful searches and seizures, are protected. Conversely, a blanket policy of granting immigration enforcement agents access to your schools and students in the absence of a valid judicial warrant may implicate these same rights. Plyler has been interpreted in this circuit as prohibiting schools from implementing policies that chill access to public education.<sup>32</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit considers whether such policies "operate∏ in such a way that it "significantly interferes with the exercise of" the right to a public education as guaranteed by *Plyler*, and found such a violation in a data collection statute.<sup>33</sup> As you have already seen, the threat of immigration enforcement actions at schools is impacting school attendance; a policy guaranteeing unfettered access to immigration enforcement agents would likely further chill access to public education.

Additionally, schools have a common law duty of care for their students.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, the Consent Decree establishes certain duties,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Fla. Stat. § 908.108.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Almeida-Sanchez v. U.S., 413 U.S. 266, 273 (1973) ("In the absence of probable cause or consent, that search violated the petitioner's Fourth Amendment right to be free of unreasonable searches and seizures."); U.S. v. Alvarez-Sanchez, 774 F.2d 1036, 1041 (11th Cir. 1985) ("Authority under [8 U.S.C. § 1357] is constrained by the fourth amendment"); Mendoza v. I.N.S., W.D.Tex.1982, 559 F.Supp. 842 ("[A]gents have the right to approach the person believed to be an alien and to ask questions so long as the agent does not restrain the person and the person is free to walk away; when the person believes that his freedom to walk away has been restrained, his rights under U.S.C.A. Const. Amend. 4 come into play.").

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Hisp. Int. Coal. of Ala., 691 F.3d at 1245–47 ("increased likelihood of deportation or harassment upon enrollment in school significantly deters undocumented children from enrolling in and attending school, in contravention of their rights under *Plyler.*").

 $<sup>^{33}</sup>$  *Id*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Limones v. Sch. Dist. of Lee Cnty., 161 So. 3d 384, 390 (Fla. 2015) ("The special relationship between schools and their students create[s] a duty of reasonable care

including that immigrant students be provided "unhindered access" to appropriate schooling, and specifically prohibits referring or reporting students to immigration authorities for any reason.<sup>35</sup> The case *Gonzalez v. City of Albuquerque* serves as an example of the claims implicated when schools prioritize immigration enforcement over their obligations to students and students' rights.<sup>36</sup>

### SCHOOL DISTRICTS MUST PROTECT STUDENT PRIVACY

School Districts Cannot Require Disclosure of Immigration Status And Should Limit Other Collected Information



As discussed above, requiring students, parents or guardians to provide schools with information regarding their immigration status or taking other actions that significantly interfere with the right to a basic public education, violates the constitutional principles set out in *Plyler v. Doe* and established Florida law.<sup>37</sup>

Florida law limits the information that schools require for enrollment to proof of age,<sup>38</sup> immunization records,<sup>39</sup> evidence of a medical exam,<sup>40</sup> and proof of residency.<sup>41</sup> Schools cannot require students to provide any information relating to their immigration status.<sup>42</sup> The law provides that families may present a range of documents to establish a child's age

for the school to take affirmative action to protect or aid the student," and tort law "requires the party to act with reasonable care toward the person in need of protection or aid.").

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> LULAC, Consent Decree, supra at n.15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> See Third Amended Complaint in *Gonzalez v. City of Albuquerque*, No. CV-05-580 JB/WPL (D.N.M. Nov. 9, 2006), <a href="https://www.maldef.org/2007/08/gonzalez-v-city-of-albuquerque-new-mexico/">https://www.maldef.org/2007/08/gonzalez-v-city-of-albuquerque-new-mexico/</a> (Albuquerque Public Schools and Border Control (a division of CBP) was sued in 2006 after school police officers in Albuquerque detained three students without probable cause and held them until they could be turned over to federal immigration authorities. This case led to a settlement under which Albuquerque Public Schools agreed to no longer cooperate with immigration officials or detain students based on immigration status or perceived immigration status. Although the case was settled and therefore a determination on the merits was never made, the lawsuit alleged Fourth and Fourteenth Amendment, Federal Tort Claims Act, and state constitutional claims.).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> See Hisp. Interest Coal. of Ala., 691 F.3d at 1245; LULAC, Consent Decree, supra at n.21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1003.21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1003.22.

<sup>40</sup> *Id* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1003.02.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> LULAC, Consent Decree, supra at n.15; see also Hisp. Interest Coal. of Ala., 691 F.3d at 1245.

without disclosing their immigration status.<sup>43</sup> Students cannot be required to provide a social security number.<sup>44</sup>

Generally, school administrators in Florida should limit student education records to basic student information, such as grades, transcripts, course schedules, health records, directory information, enrollment dates, special education records, and disciplinary records. Beyond that, consider the general rule of thumb: *If there is no reason to collect it, then do not collect it.* 

Schools should also review what information is contained in school directories, and remind parents, guardians, and adult students that they have a right to opt out of having their information included in the directory. While directory information is often released pursuant to federal law, schools are required to first provide parents with notice regarding their right to refuse disclosure. 46

Limitations On Immigration Agents' Authority to Access Students' Records.

Parents and students have the right to privacy with respect to education records, and Florida law allows parents and students to sue schools for violating this right.<sup>47</sup> Thus, schools and school districts may not release personal information contained in a student's education records without the written consent of the parent/guardian or adult student.<sup>48</sup> To avoid liability, schools should take precautions to ensure that school records are not disclosed or used in a way that could harm students.<sup>49</sup>

Generally, schools may disclose information to a law enforcement officer *only if* they have a valid court order or judicial subpoena.<sup>50</sup> Any document presented by immigration agents should be reviewed by legal counsel before the district produces any information. In addition, schools

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1003.21(4).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1002.20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(a)(5)(B).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 99.37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Fla. Stat. § 1002.22(2); 20 U.S.C. § 1232(g) (FERPA).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> See 20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 C.F.R. §§ 99.1-99.67 (We use "adult student" here for simplicity; those same protections extend to minors enrolled in postsecondary classes as an "eligible student."); 34 C.F.R. § 99.5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 C.F.R. §§ 99.1-99.67; The U.S. Department of Education Privacy Technical Assistance Center provides a Data Security Checklist that schools can consult. *See* Priv. Tech. Assistance Ctr., U.S. Dep't. Educ., *Data Security Checklist* (rev. 2015), <a href="https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource-document/file/Data%20Security%20Checklist-0.pdf">https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource-document/file/Data%20Security%20Checklist-0.pdf</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(b)(2)(B), (b)(1)(J).

must make a reasonable effort to alert parents or adult students to a subpoena before providing the student's information so they may seek protective action, with some exceptions.<sup>51</sup> Administrative subpoenas are not judicial subpoenas and are not enforceable on their own, absent a separate judicial order or legal proceeding to enforce the subpoena.<sup>52</sup>

While the federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) includes a health or safety emergency provision, it is extremely limited and permits disclosures only when necessary due to an actual, impending, or imminent emergency, such as a natural disaster, terrorist attack, campus shooting, or outbreak of an epidemic disease.<sup>53</sup> This exception does not allow for any blanket release of a student's education records and applies equally to the records of an individual student and records about a group of students.<sup>54</sup>

As a general practice, districts should review their policies and practices regarding the management and use of student data. Districts must ensure that staff, contractors, consultants, agency partners, and volunteers with access to students' records respect students' state and federal FERPA rights.

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<sup>51</sup> See 34 C.F.R. § 99.31(a)(9)(ii).

<sup>52</sup> See National Immigration Law Center, Warrants and Subpoenas: What to Look Out For and How to Respond, 4-6 (2025), <a href="https://www.nilc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2025-Subpoenas-Warrants\_.pdf">https://www.nilc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2025-Subpoenas-Warrants\_.pdf</a>; Off. Legal Pol'y, U.S. Dep't Just., Report to Congress on the Use of Administrative Subpoena Authorities by Executive Branch Agencies and Entities, Section II.A.2 (2002), <a href="https://www.justice.gov/archive/olp/rpt\_to\_congress.htm#2a2">https://www.justice.gov/archive/olp/rpt\_to\_congress.htm#2a2</a> ("Congress has consistently required that agencies and departments seek enforcement of administrative subpoenas through a federal district court. Federal courts have generally recognized that '[b]ifurcation of the power, on the one hand of the agency to issue subpoenas and on the other hand of the courts to enforce them, is an inherent protection against abuse of subpoena power.").

<sup>53</sup> See 34 C.F.R. §§ 99.31(a)(10) 99.36; Student Priv. Pol'y Off., U.S. Dep't Educ., FERPA and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Frequently Asked Questions, 3-4 (2020), <a href="https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource-document/file/FERPA%20and%20Coronavirus%20Frequently%20Asked%20Questions.pdf">https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource-document/file/FERPA%20and%20Coronavirus%20Frequently%20Asked%20Questions.pdf</a> (requiring that "there [be] a specific emergency is not based on a generalized or distant threat of a possible or eventual emergency for which the likelihood of occurrence is unknown, such as would be addressed in general emergency preparedness activities"); U.S. Dep't of Educ., Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and H1N1, 3 (2009), <a href="https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource-document/file/ferpa-h1n1.pdf">https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource-document/file/ferpa-h1n1.pdf</a> (requiring that school officials determine that the emergency exists "in the particular school or school district").

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> *Id*. at 3.

Districts Must Ensure Any School Security Officers Abide by Student Privacy Laws.

To protect students' privacy rights, districts should ensure that school-security officers, including school resource officers, do not have general access to FERPA-protected records.

Only those designated as "school officials" in order to fulfill a "legitimate educational interest" may access student information.<sup>55</sup> Officers can only be considered school officials if the school has direct control over the officer's maintenance and use of education records,<sup>56</sup> and officers' disclosures are subject to FERPA's requirements.<sup>57</sup> To be clear, immigration enforcement is not a "legitimate educational interest."<sup>58</sup>

School officials have a continuing legal responsibility to protect student privacy, including how student records are used and when those records are shared with "school officials" having "legitimate educational interests." School officials are responsible for ensuring that security officers do not improperly access, use or re-disclose protected information released to contractors, school security, etc.

To ensure compliance with federal and state laws, we recommend that:

- Districts require school security staff to commit to not inquire about immigration status, to not engage in immigration enforcement activities at the school, and to not detain students for purposes of immigration enforcement.
- Districts educate school security officers about the legal protections for immigrant students and inform them that if they engage in immigration enforcement activities, they risk violating federal and state law.

Districts must also ensure that such school security officers properly follow Fourth and Fifth Amendment standards for detention, interrogation, search, and seizure. We recommend that districts review their policing practices to focus on protecting the school community from outside threats and limit law enforcement interactions with students to immediate threats to physical safety.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 99.8(b)(2); 34 C.F.R. § 99.31(a)(1)(i)(A).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 99.31(a)(1)(i)(B)(2).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 99.33(a)(2).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> See Priv. Tech. Assistance Ctr., U.S. Dep't Educ., School Resource Officers, School Law Enforcement Units, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 15-17 (2019), <a href="https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/resources/school-resource-officers-school-law-enforcement-units-and-ferpa">https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/resources/school-resource-officers-school-law-enforcement-units-and-ferpa</a>.

# STAY INFORMED ON LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS TO ENSURE COMPLIANCE AND TO ENSURE YOUR SCHOOLS ARE SAFE AND WELCOMING FOR ALL STUDENTS

Many organizations are working to provide up-to-date information for educators amidst quickly evolving policies relating to immigration. The following resources may be helpful as policies and practices develop:

- The National Immigration Law Center (<a href="https://www.nilc.org/resources">https://www.nilc.org/resources</a>) maintains current information about changing immigration policies.
- The National Education Association's Guidance on Immigration Issues (<a href="https://www.nea.org/resource-library/guidance-immigration-issues">https://www.nea.org/resource-library/guidance-immigration-issues</a>) offers information specifically for educators.

Thank you for your important work to ensure that all Florida children receive the education they are entitled to and need in order to thrive. If your district would like to discuss your district's policies or any of the contents of this letter in greater detail, please contact us at ImmigrationLawQuestions@aclufl.org.

ACLU

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION FOUNDATION

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Sincerely,

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