

Investigations

ICE training was slashed, records show, corroborating whistleblower claims

Previously unreported records also offer new details about what was cut from ICE's basic training program. Concerns about the quality of ICE agents' training have mounted for months.

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By [Sarah Blaskey](#)

Sarah Blaskey is an investigative reporter who can be reached

Immigration and Customs Enforcement dramatically cut it meant to speed up the Trump administration's deportation Washington Post show, corroborating a whistleblower's cl

After former ICE instructor Ryan Schwank testified during a congressional hearing last week, the Department of Homeland Security denied any reduction in the amount or quality of training provided to ICE recruits. The previously undisclosed records obtained by The Post show that, as the whistleblower said, ICE last year removed about 240 hours from its basic training program, or more than 40 percent of instructional time.

The documents also offer new insight into how and when the training program was reduced. The vast majority of the cuts occurred in August, the records show, as the Trump administration pushed ICE to double the number of officers in the field by the end of 2025.

The initial cuts eliminated more than 100 hours dedicated scenarios, including half the 56 hours once spent on firearm training time was almost entirely cut. Also eliminated were such topics as case processing and deportation officers' leg

With further cuts later that fall, the records show, ICE had eliminated three-quarters of the hours once dedicated to evaluating recruits' practical skills, including firearms handling. The agency eliminated time for driving tests and cut all 26 hours previously allotted for evaluating recruits' grasp of skills specific to immigration enforcement and deportation operations.

As of Jan. 1, records show, more than 900 ICE officers had completed a shortened version of basic training and were destined for field offices across the country. That is more than three times the total number of graduates in the 12 months before August, when the program was first cut.

Asked about The Post’s findings, ICE acknowledged that the program has been accelerated by increasing the daily training time and adding an extra day of training each week but insisted that there had been no cuts to overall training hours, requirements or subject matter.

“ICE officers go through a rigorous on-the-job training and mentorship,” the agency said in a statement. It said new officers take what they learn at the academy and “apply it to real-life scenarios while on duty, preserving ICE’s reputation as one of the most elite law enforcement agencies not only in the U.S., but the entire world.”

Concerns about the quality of immigration officers’ training have been mounting for months amid reports of violent arrests and heavy-handed crowd-control tactics, along with two high-profile killings of U.S. citizens by federal immigration agents during protests in Minneapolis this year.

On Feb. 23, Schwank, a lawyer who recently resigned from his teaching position at the ICE academy, testified that the agency had removed so many essential courses from the program that “even in the final days of training, the cadets cannot demonstrate a solid grasp of the tactics or the law required to perform their jobs.”

That same day, congressional Democrats made public DHS documents indicating that ICE last year removed courses that were once part of its basic training program. The records obtained by The Post were not among those released by the Democrats and did not come from the same source.

The records obtained by The Post include four training program outlines, dated between July 2025 and January 2026, that break down the hours allocated to instructional topics. The records also track student outcomes and time at the academy. They reveal a steep decline in the graduation rate as DHS ramped up recruitment, part of President Donald Trump’s goal to double the number of ICE officers to 20,000 and deport an unprecedented 1 million people each year.

“Students must meet all requirements, otherwise they will not be made law enforcement officers,” ICE told The Post, citing the lower graduation rate as evidence that the academy has not lowered standards.

ICE made slight adjustments to the basic training program after the sweeping cuts last year, the records show. After initially cutting the training time dedicated to use of force by three hours, for instance, ICE later added five hours on that subject. Asked about the change, ICE told The Post that the agency “increased de-escalation training for recruits to ensure they are prepared for attacks from ICE agitators.”

Before the changes last summer, ICE basic training was a 72-day program held at the headquarters of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers, a sprawling campus in southeastern Georgia. ICE never formally announced changes to the program but told reporters on a media tour in August that it had been streamlined to eight weeks.

Pushed for specifics at the time, the agency said it had eliminated a Spanish-language requirement. But Spanish instruction was not part of the ICE basic training program. It was a separate course for recruits who could not pass a Spanish fluency test. The records obtained by The Post show cutting the language requirement eliminated only four hours from the basic training program — the time previously set aside for that test.

Since the August media tour, officials have given conflicting accounts about training time. In the past month, they have stated at different times that the basic training last 47 days, 42 days and 56 days.

The DHS records obtained and analyzed by The Post show that the program was first cut to 47 days in August and further reduced in September to 42 days. Since then, all trainings have been on a 42-day schedule, the records show.

DHS and ICE officials have repeatedly said that no training time has been lost, in part because the academy increased daily instruction from eight hours to 12 hours. The Post's analysis of the records shows that as recently as January, students were receiving about eight hours of daily instruction. That hadn't changed as of February, according to a DHS official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

Asked about the discrepancy, ICE repeated the claim about 12-hour days and added that those hours include "personalized independent training." The statement emphasized in bold: "It's the same hours of training officers have always received."

ICE also said graduates of the academy go on to receive "an average of 28 days of on-the-job training."

Policing expert Marc Brown, an instructor at the University of South Carolina's law school, told The Post that "training on the job doesn't replace training at the academy, especially in a law enforcement career."

From 2019 to 2024, Brown taught physical techniques, including the use of handcuffs and defensive tactics, at the ICE basic training program. Incoming deportation officers need time to practice their new skills in safe, controlled environments before going into the field, Brown said, "so that if mistakes are made or there are things you could do better, you have a chance to make that mental correction."

Slightly more than 230 new deportation officers began ICE basic training in 2024, records show. In 2025, that same number had started at the ICE academy by the beginning of August. This followed a midsummer recruitment boom spurred by the passage of Trump's sweeping tax-and-spending legislation, which tripled the agency's enforcement and deportation budget to about \$30 billion.

To boost the number of applicants, ICE lifted age restrictions, offered student loan forgiveness and \$50,000 signing bonuses, and held recruitment events where some prospective agents were told they could receive tentative offer letters on the spot. By the end of September, cohorts of up to 48 trainees were arriving at the facility in Georgia almost daily, records show.

In the past, all new deportation officers were required to attend the academy. Now, only recruits who have no law enforcement experience are sent to the academy. Recruits with law enforcement experience, including “arrest authorities,” are instead required to take an online course, and then they, too, “receive in-person on the job training,” ICE said.

The records obtained by The Post show that more than 1,400 ICE recruits attended a shortened version of basic training in Georgia between August and Jan. 1. Those students failed or dropped out at high rates, and the 2025 graduation rate plummeted from around 80 percent among recruits who went through the full-length training to around 60 percent for those in shortened versions.

One in every four recruits destined for field offices by the end of the year flunked out of the shortened training program, records show. Among those who fell short, the majority failed written exams. Most of the remainder failed the physical abilities assessment, which requires recruits to complete a timed run and an obstacle course. Only three people failed that test in the first half of 2025 before ICE loosened certain enrollment standards and slashed more than 40 hours of preparation time.

Brown attributed the low graduation rate in part to the reduced hours of instruction, which he said don't provide new officers enough time to absorb material or practice difficult skills one-on-one with instructors in remedial workshops. He said it also appeared ICE's hiring spree pulled in more than the usual number of recruits who weren't suited for or capable of the job.

What readers are saying

The comments express significant concern and criticism regarding the reduction of ICE's basic training program by over 40 percent. Many commenters argue that the reduction in training has led to poorly trained, unqualified, and potentially dangerous ICE officers who engage in... [Show more](#)

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