

College student steps into traffic, is killed after losing immigration status

 [washingtonpost.com/immigration/2026/09/01/haitian-immigrant-ohio-takes-his-own-life-after-losing-temporary-protected-status-family-says](https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2026/09/01/haitian-immigrant-ohio-takes-his-own-life-after-losing-temporary-protected-status-family-says)

Arelis R. Hernández

September 1, 2026



A Haitian immigrant who had grown increasingly distraught after losing his protection from deportation and being outfitted with an ankle monitor was run over and killed Monday in what his family believes was a suicide.

Pierre Damas Bel, 20, parked on the shoulder of Interstate 70 in Springfield, Ohio, some time before 8:45 a.m., got out of his vehicle and walked into westbound traffic, the Ohio State Highway Patrol told local media outlets. He was hit by a tractor-trailer and pronounced dead at the scene.

Like an estimated 350,000 Haitian immigrants, Bel had recently [lost temporary protected status](#), which is given to people fleeing nations experiencing disaster. He had a pending asylum claim, but had been summoned to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement office after the Supreme Court allowed the

Trump administration to [proceed with canceling](#) the status for Haitian recipients. Federal immigrant agents placed an electronic monitoring device on his ankle, which is one way the agency tracks immigrants it is seeking to remove from the country.

“He felt like he was treated like an animal,” his father, Pierres Ronal Bel, 40, recounted in a handwritten statement.

Ohio authorities said they are investigating the crash.

The Department of Homeland Security did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The Trump administration has been calling Haitian immigrants into ICE offices in order to be [equipped with ankle monitors](#) and sent [two deportation flights](#) to Haiti since temporary protected status was canceled for people from the troubled Caribbean nation. Advocates for the immigrants say the U.S. government is sending people back to a country where [criminal gangs are responsible](#) for massacres, kidnapping and extortion.

Haitian leaders in Springfield and beyond said Bel’s death is symptomatic of the extreme stress many immigrants are under as they fear being detained and sent back.

“These policies are what caused his untimely death,” said Guerline Jozef of the Haitian Bridge Alliance, a nonprofit that provides legal and humanitarian aid to migrants.

Bel arrived in the United States in 2024 in order to reunite with his parents, who had fled Haiti three years before. The family was granted temporary protected status, purchased a home in Springfield and settled into life in the U.S. Bel dreamed of studying medicine and graduated high school last May with honors and as a proud member of the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC), his father said. He was the eldest of three siblings and his family described him as smart and responsible.

The young man’s Instagram account is full of photos of himself smiling in his JROTC uniform and displaying his diploma and various academic awards.

Bel wanted to continue life as a cadet in the program, but was distressed by what transpired after temporary protected status was canceled for Haitians. His father said he couldn’t play soccer as he had for years because of the weight of the tracker. Classmates bullied him and made cruel remarks. He begged federal immigration officers to remove the bracelet, his father said, but they refused.

“I came to this country to pursue my education. I didn’t come here to commit a crime or hurt anyone,” he wrote on Instagram in late July. “Yet now I’m walking through the streets of the United States with a GPS monitor on my leg, carrying a feeling of shame and humiliation that I never imagined I would experience.”

Then on Friday, his JROTC class instructor handed students their uniforms, which resemble those of the U.S. armed forces, but did not give one to Bel. His father said the college student concluded it was because of the device strapped around his ankle.

“He came home that day feeling very bad,” Pierres Ronal Bel said through a translator.

The younger Bel’s next asylum court hearing was scheduled for October. He did not want to return to his home country because he was afraid of the rampant violence, according to Vilés Dorsainvil, executive director of the Haitian Support Center in Springfield, which is supporting the family.

On Monday morning, he left his family’s home and placed a video call to his father at 8:03 a.m.

“I’m not feeling okay,” Pierres Ronal Bel recalled his son stating. “I told him to come so that we can talk.”

Hours later, he said police officers arrived at his door to report that his son “threw himself under a truck.”

Community leaders consoled Bel’s parents at their home Monday evening. His solemn father gave interviews with reporters and his mother wailed from an upstairs room. Residents have been banding together to support Haitian neighbors and call for an end to ICE’s enforcement campaign against them.

Carl Ruby, a pastor who leads a Springfield congregation and advocates for Haitian immigrants, said he was struggling to make sense of the younger Bel’s untimely death.

“I know that I’m a pastor and I’m supposed to be forgiving,” he said. “But right now as I sit with a broken family, I’m crying out to God for righteous judgment in those who made this happen.”

If you or someone you know needs help, visit 988lifeline.org or call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988.