

ICE is quietly firing new hires. For one recruit, it was devastating.

 [washingtonpost.com/immigration/2026/09/15/ice-is-quietly-firing-new-hires-one-recruit-it-was-devastating](https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2026/09/15/ice-is-quietly-firing-new-hires-one-recruit-it-was-devastating)

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Joseph Moore had dreamed of a life in law enforcement since he was a teenager. “Policing is in my blood,” he wrote a Pennsylvania town’s supervisors in 2020. “There is no other career for me.”

But the Marine reservist struggled to advance his career, according to employment records included in federal court filings. Two law enforcement agencies fired him, and others rejected him altogether before he landed a policing job in a small city with little room to move up.

Then U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement went on a [hiring binge](#) last year to help carry out the Trump administration’s promise of [mass deportations](#). The agency offered \$50,000 signing bonuses, similar to what Moore had previously earned in salary in a year. He was hired in the fall as a deportation officer — one of 12,000 recruits offered jobs.

The hiring happened so quickly that many new officers were put on the streets before being adequately vetted, multiple former officials said. An ICE whistleblower urged officials to halt the massive expansion, saying in [a memo](#) to the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Inspector General in August 2025 that the “overwhelmed” agency had hired officers without checking their fingerprints or their identities.

In recent months, the agency has begun quietly firing some of the recruits, according to three former DHS officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal matters shared with them privately. They said ICE has cited red flags that should have been identified earlier, or poor performance. Concerns about vetting exploded into public view this summer, after relatives and court records described the [volatile history](#) of a different recruit alleged to have been involved in the [fatal shooting](#) of [an immigrant](#) in Maine.

ICE notified Moore in late August that he was going to be fired and instructed him to come to the agency’s Philadelphia office, according to two federal officials who also spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss personnel matters. ICE had identified issues in his past, the officials said, including being fired from other law enforcement agencies.

The 38-year-old father of two had fought for his job when supervisors wanted to fire him in the past.

This time, he parked his car in a lot outside the office, and he had his gun. Law enforcement officers tried to stop him, but Moore eventually shot and killed himself, according to the Philadelphia Police Department.

The death initially received little attention outside the ICE field office in Philadelphia. The citymedical examiner's office said a man named Joseph Moore died on Aug. 28 by suicide, from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. ICE informed all deportation officers of his death in an email on Friday, following inquiries from The Washington Post, and a spokesperson said the incident was under investigation.



Protesters gather outside the ICE field office in Philadelphia on Jan. 10, 2026, to rally against the killing of Renée Good. (Matthew Hatcher/AFP/Getty Images)

“Anytime an individual takes their own life it’s incredibly saddening,” ICE said, adding that it provides counseling and other support to employees. “Our thoughts and prayers are with his family at this troubling time.”

In a statement to The Post, Moore’s family defended his record as a law enforcement officer and raised doubts that he died by suicide. On Tuesday, after the story’s publication, the family offered further information on the nature of their concerns, which centered on how Philadelphia police handled a situation with a suicidal individual.

“Moore was on the phone with ICE officials during his final moments,” the family said. “His interlocutor from ICE was seeking to resolve the situation peacefully and believed that Moore

had been talked down when Moore's vehicle was subsequently surrounded by Philadelphia Police officers, with guns drawn."

A spokesperson for the Philadelphia Police Department said officials have concluded an investigation and none of their officers fired a weapon during the incident. The spokesperson said officers responded to a report of an armed individual in distress and that they attempted to "de-escalate the situation." The individual then "drew a firearm and discharged it toward himself."

Two of Moore's colleagues at ICE's Philadelphia office said they believe that his death might have never happened if the agency had adequately vetted him. Both officers were hired around the same time as Moore and no longer work at the agency. They shared information about Moore on the condition of anonymity because they feared that speaking out could jeopardize their careers.

While it's unknown what drove Moore's actions, the officers said ICE put him in a poor position by hiring and then firing him, which can be highly damaging for someone in law enforcement. They said ICE should have reviewed his employment history and determined he wasn't qualified before offering him a job. Moore had grown fond of the position, they said, and he was eager to stay at the agency.

"Once you get fired from law enforcement, it's terribly hard, right or wrong, to get back into law enforcement," one of the officers said. "It's the death of a career, and the weight of this hits some officers hard enough where they take their own lives."

'Basic processes weren't even followed'

ICE launched its hiring push last year after President Donald Trump signed the One Big Beautiful Bill on the Fourth of July. The legislation set aside billions to double ICE's officer workforce from about 10,000 to 22,000. Officials hosted [massive job fairs with World War II-like](#) recruiting posters, slashed weeks off basic training or waived it entirely, and lifted the age cap of 40 to apply. Homeland Security [said](#) more than 220,000 applications poured in over a few months.

A former deportation officer who left the agency this summer told The Post that his ICE field office in the southern United States swelled to an unmanageable size from November to January. Hirings surged from one or two people to 60 at a time. There weren't enough bathrooms or desks.

"People were stacked on top of people and sharing two to three people per cubicle," said the former officer, who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear of retaliation.

After Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General, the agency watchdog, announced last year that it would audit ICE's hiring practices, an ICE unit chief sent the office a confidential memoreviewed by The Postthat warned the agency was failing to vet applicants. The memo was first reported by The New York Times.

Message The Post

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On its website, ICE says vetting is mandatory and includes interviews with the applicant and people who know them, criminal and background checks, and fingerprint and credit screenings.

A spokesperson said that the agency "diligently applies" proper vetting regulations and that applicants may be offered a "temporary status" to begin training pending a full background investigation.

But the whistleblower, who oversaw a staff of 100 in ICE's Office of Professional Responsibility, which manages background investigations for job applicants, said he had never seen the agency hire people so quickly. Human resources personnel made final job offers before preliminary vetting was complete. Applicants were cleared for duty "without fingerprints, identity verification, or credit checks," he wrote.



An ICE hiring event in Arlington, Texas, in August 2025. (Ron Jenkins/Getty Images)

The official recommended that the hiring surge stop “until compliance with governing standards is restored.” But hiring continued, and the whistleblower retired in July of this year. He declined an interview.

“They failed to engage in basic vetting requirements which led my client to be alarmed that they were putting agents on the street without knowing anything about their backgrounds,” said Kevin Owen, the attorney representing the whistleblower. “The basic processes weren’t even followed.”

In a statement, ICE said the firings now taking place are “nothing new.”

“ICE is hiring the best of the best to go after the worst of the worst criminal illegal aliens including drug traffickers, murderers, and pedophiles,” the agency said. “When individuals fall short of that standard — personnel decisions are made. This is standard practice in almost every American workplace.”

A career of service and conflict

Moore was raised in the suburbs of Philadelphia. When he was 18, his mother reported to police that he had driven her car without permission, according to his testimony in a federal lawsuit he would file years later against a former employer. The police officer dispatched to talk to Moore inspired him to pursue a career in law enforcement, he recalled years later during a deposition. No charges were filed.

Moore enlisted in the Marines after high school, and after five years he shifted to a part-time commitment as a reservist. In 2014, he graduated from a police academy and moved from one small-town job to the next.

The Washington Police Department in southwestern Pennsylvania opened an investigation into an incident in which Moore arrested an on-duty jail captain in May 2018 during a dispute over a prisoner.

In their statement to The Post, Moore’s family said that he was not at fault, and that he made the arrest in consultation with supervisors after the jail captain refused to admit the prisoner and forbade Moore from leaving to answer an emergency call. There was a protracted legal dispute in the aftermath that ended with the city offering the jail captain an undisclosed sum. Moore’s family said he was found not to have violated departmental policies. The jailer alleged in federal court records that the city’s internal investigation found that his conduct was “egregious” and he was told to resign or be fired. Current and former city officials declined to comment or did not respond to inquiries from The Post.

Moore resigned a few months later. He found work at another small-town police department, but that job ended badly.

The Lower Frederick Township Board of Supervisors determined that he should be let go after he filed erroneous police reports, endorsed a vendor's gear without permission, wore an unauthorized firearm and failed to appear at an alleged intoxicated driver's court hearing, according to official township records filed in court.

Moore fought to keep his job, writing in a 2020 email that he could imagine no other career. He said he and his wife had relocated with their children and purchased their first home after he took the job. Losing it would be "absolutely devastating," he wrote.

"I am fully aware that I am to blame for this, and how important it is to follow all orders and guidelines," he wrote.

He was not reinstated.

The incident appeared to have a profound impact on Moore. His family said he had been "disproportionately and inappropriately disciplined" and ultimately fired for minor infractions. For instance, he acknowledged missing a DUI hearing for a habitual offender, which resulted in the charges being dropped. But he said he refiled them and attended the hearings.

Moore filed wrongful-termination lawsuits alleging that he was punished for challenging racist and sexist remarks by the chief, and that the township was impeding his efforts to get a new job. The township rejected his allegations and settled the cases.

Despite the firings, Moore continued pursuing a career in service. He climbed the ladder in the Marine Corps Reserve, where he oversaw the maintenance of aircraft electronics, among other duties. The Internal Revenue Service hired him as a criminal investigator and then fired him after completing a background check. Special Agent in Charge Yury Kruty of the IRS's Philadelphia field office wrote in June 2022 that Moore had downplayed incidents in his past.

"Your lack of candor in your prior law enforcement career deems you unsuitable to be an IRS Special Agent," he wrote to Moore, according to a copy of the letter filed in federal court.

Moore appealed the termination and lost, court records show.

By August of that year, Moore had found part-time work as a police officer in the borough of Spring City, Pennsylvania. He worked his way up to a full-time job earning in the mid-\$50,000s. He had hoped to move up in the ranks, but three years later, he was still an officer. Nonetheless, the city of 4,000 celebrated his Marine Corps promotion to the senior enlisted rank of master sergeant at a small outdoor ceremony in 2025.

Moore, in a cap and uniform, posed for photos with his family. His wife held a bouquet of flowers.

“Your dedication to service is inspiring!” Mayor Adam Alberico wrote on Facebook.

Before the year’s end, Moore had been offered a job with ICE.

Concerns about suitability

Moore arrived at the ICE field office in Philadelphia intent on starting a new chapter, one of his former colleagues there said. He dressed in a cap, trousers and button-down shirts instead of the standard plainclothes attire of a T-shirt and jeans. He thought that being a deportation officer was more straightforward than policing. He had to identify viable targets, locate and arrest them.

“Everybody liked Joe,” said the 56-year-old ICE co-worker, who said he was hired around the same time as Moore. “He was a guy hired like a lot of us, trying to learn a different job.”

The colleague said he was surprised to receive a start date and time to report for work without a formal job interview.

“There was no oral interview,” the man said. “It’s all online, it’s all emails.”

ICE’s website says deportation officers must fill out a form and undergo background checks of their job, family and financial history.



A display at ICE's hiring event last year in Arlington. (Ron Jenkins/Getty Images)

The man said he and Moore were not required to attend basic training at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers in Georgia because they had policing experience. Instead, the two sat in a room together and took an online ICE training program to learn about processing paperwork for people who were arrested.

A second former ICE deportation officer in Philadelphia said he was also hired without a job interview. The government sent him an email with a job title and location. He had 48 hours to accept and negotiated the start date via email.

The second officer said he had about a week of in-person training on firearms and defensive tactics, and also was allowed to skip ICE's training academy. But he said that the online deportation officer course lacked rigor and that many recruits "kind of clicked through it, which was scary, because it was actual immigration law."

The officer called Moore a "wonderful father" who "cared a lot about getting home to spend time with his kids."

But he worried that Moore didn't have the right temperament for law enforcement. During one of their assignments together, he said, Moore shattered a car window to reach allegedly undocumented immigrants inside.

"It was like, whoa, why did this guy break this window out?" the former officer said, and Moore later said he was embarrassed for using force. "Clearly, a very intelligent guy, and very capable and competent, but his behavior during arrest operations to me was a little bit erratic or spastic."

Moore's family said that his use of force was "lawful" and in accordance with policy, and that he had "expressed his own personal regret at this action because he preferred to avoid the use of force."

But ICE began raising questions about his suitability for the role in May. Moore's family said he received an "unsuitability letter" that month via email that cited his own admission that he'd been terminated from the Lower Frederick department, and later from the IRS. They said he challenged that determination, believing that the terminations all stemmed from the Lower Frederick department's firing.

ICE continued to employ him for three more months.

Moore texted the second former officer on Aug. 22 and said he'd been in an "awful car wreck" on his way to work the previous day. The friend shared that and other messages from Moore with The Post.

A Ford truck traveling around 40 mph had struck the driver's side of Moore's blue Toyota Camry at around 5:15 a.m., according to a police report obtained by The Post. Firefighters found Moore trapped but conscious in the ICE-issued vehicle and freed him by removing the driver's side door. The report noted Moore had entered the roadway "improperly" and drove "carelessly." Moore's family disputed that he was at fault. Neither driver was charged.

Moore said in the texts that he was admitted to the hospital with a concussion, broken ribs and multiple other injuries. He sent his friend a photo showing the vehicle's smashed windshield, crumpled hood and front wheel knocked off its axle. He said the car's tinted windows made it difficult to see in the dark.

ICE's management hadn't called to check on him, he lamented to his former colleague. He worried about being stigmatized after officials retrieved his firearm while he was in the hospital. "Taking my credentials and gun makes me feel like a leper," Moore wrote. "There's no greater insult to a cop."

Moore was concerned about getting fired, and crafted a memo to ICE explaining how the crash had happened and why he should not be held liable, his friend said. The man told Moore he could file a lawsuit if he was let go.

"I don't want a lawsuit, I just want a job," Moore texted back. "It's all I have."

'People shouldn't have to die for this'

Anxiety over a steady stream of unexplained firings permeated the workforce this summer, current and former officers said.

Moore's first former colleague said he was placed on paid leave in June because of "some issue with my background." He said his supervisors confiscated his badge, gun and equipment, and told him they were following orders from D.C.

Then on Aug. 31, ICE summoned the man to the Philadelphia office and fired him. He said an official handed him a letter outlining three issues in his background that made him unsuitable for the job.

The former officer declined to share the letter with The Post, but he said the agency should have raised that earlier.

The second officer separately quit the agency. DHS had said officers would arrest the "worst of the worst." But he said ICE was under so much pressure to make arrests that officers would instead end up arresting people who did not have a [violent criminal record](#).

Moore's family said ICE notified him that he was going to be terminated one day short of his one-year anniversary on the job, and three days after filing a worker's compensation request related to the car crash. . They said they were not aware whether his service weapon had been retrieved at the hospital and do not know if he had it with him when he went to the ICE office.

His family did not comment on how Moore seemed in the days before he died or whether his relatives think ICE bears any responsibility, stating only that "Moore was a decorated Marine, a graduate of the police academy, and had 12 years of law enforcement experience."

His two former colleagues believe ICE should have reviewed his background from the beginning and determined that he wasn't suited for the job. Then Moore wouldn't have invested his time, energy and financial future in an agency that didn't think he was fit for the position.

"The job's important, but it's not that important," the first officer said. "People shouldn't have to die for this."

correctionA previous version of this article incorrectly said that Joseph Moore's family denied that his service weapon was taken away from him after the crash. The family said they did not know whether his service weapon was retrieved from him at the hospital. After this article was published, the family also said they did not know whether Moore had his service weapon on him on the day he died. In addition, a photo caption in a previous version of this article gave an incorrect year that protesters were gathered to rally against the killing of Renée Good. It was on Jan. 10, 2026, not 2025.

Aaron Schaffer contributed to this report.

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