

## App Developer and Activist Joshua Aaron Fights Back With an App That Alerts Users of Ice Sightings in Real Time

App developer and activist Joshua Aaron created an iPhone app to alert nationwide users of nearby ICE sightings to keep them safe

ELI YOUNG • 16 HOURS AGO



*A protestor holds the American flag upside-down, symbolizing great distress in the country*

*Courtesy of Eli Young*

“When we see 5-year-olds in courtrooms without representation, college students being disappeared for their political beliefs and babies ripped from their mothers’ arms as they scream for their children in the name of patriotism, we are watching history repeat itself,” said Joshua Aaron, developer of ICEBlock, to *Los Angeles*. He describes our current climate and the ongoing deportations as reminiscent of Nazi Germany, “This is literally the rise of fascism and authoritarianism, everybody should do their part to fight back against it.”

ICEBlock is a free app available on iPhone that allows users to report and see ICE sightings within a five-mile radius of them. The app sends real-time notifications if ICE is near you, so you can plan accordingly.

“Imagine you’re walking down the street, and a notification comes up that says, ‘ICE spotted four blocks ahead,’” explained Aaron, “Instead of continuing down that path, you can turn left or turn around and avoid the situation altogether.”

After seeing all the detentions and deportations of immigrants, he felt that history was repeating itself, and he had to do something. He wanted to create an early warning system, and ICEBlock was born.

A core principle of the app design was 100% anonymity for the user base. There is no sign-up process. Once the app is downloaded, there is no prompt to make an account or track your data.

“The permissions granted to the app are solely for the functionality of the features,” a statement on the app tells users. “Our top priority is ensuring you stay up to date and secure.”

The app does not currently have a way to verify reports; however, there are guidelines and safeguards to prevent spam. Every sighting that has been reported gets deleted after four hours, and users can only make a report every 5 minutes. Reports can only be made within 5 miles of the user.

Todd M. Lyons, the acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, released a statement on Monday following a CNN interview with Aaron published on Monday morning, where he described the app as “reckless and irresponsible.”

“Going on live television to announce an app that lets anyone zero in on their locations is like inviting violence against them with a national megaphone,” said Lyons.

In a statement given to *Los Angeles* by Aaron, he said that ICEBlock does not condone violence, and the app serves to allow users to avoid potentially harmful situations. It informs, not obstructs.

“We’re not going to be deterred, we will not be intimidated,” said Aaron, “As long as ICE agents have quotas and this administration ignores people’s constitutional rights, we will continue fighting back. No human is illegal.”

Aaron said the final straw that pushed him to make it was reading Project 2025. After seeing the president’s first term, hearing the campaign rhetoric for the second, and then getting re-elected, it all added up.

“I had to figure out a way to help people, and this was one of the best things I could come up with,” he said.