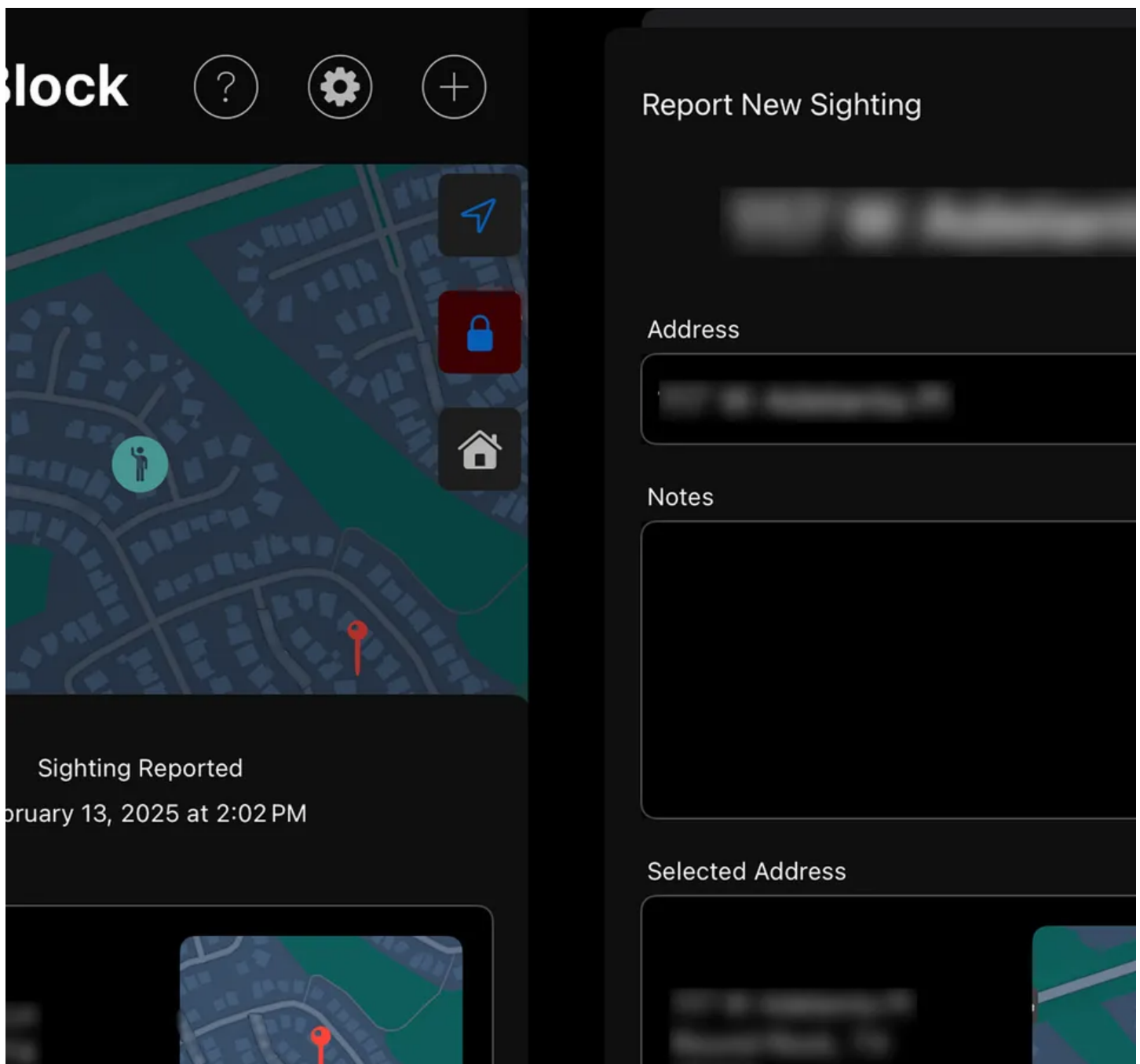
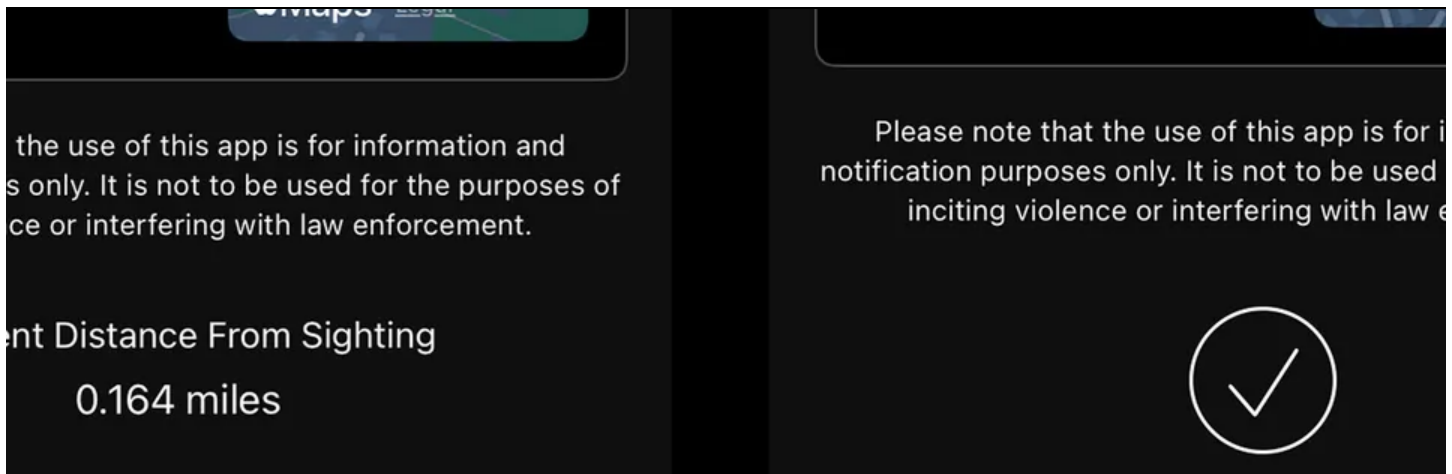


# Trump Officials Want to Prosecute Over the ICEBlock App. Lawyers Say That's Unconstitutional

The platform, which allows users to anonymously share the locations of ICE agents, is currently the third most downloaded iPhone app.





PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ICEBLOCK

COMMENTS

SAVE

Sign up for the Gear newsletter the get our best reviews, buying guides and Prime Day deals picked by experts

SIGN UP

By signing up, you agree to our [user agreement](#) (including [class action waiver and arbitration provisions](#)), and acknowledge our [privacy policy](#).

**AS THE POPULARITY** of ICEBlock, an app where people can share sightings of immigration enforcement officials, has soared in recent days, Trump administration officials have threatened to prosecute its developer and CNN for reporting on the platform. But legal experts tell WIRED that there is nothing illegal about the app and prosecuting its creator would be unconstitutional.

The app, which launched in April, allows users to anonymously share the locations of ICE agents within a five-mile radius. Joshua Aaron, the app's developer, says ICEBlock is quickly growing, with more than 241,000 users. As of this writing, it's the third most downloaded free iPhone app in the United States,

---

## Daily Newsletter

Our biggest stories, handpicked for you each day.

**SIGN UP**

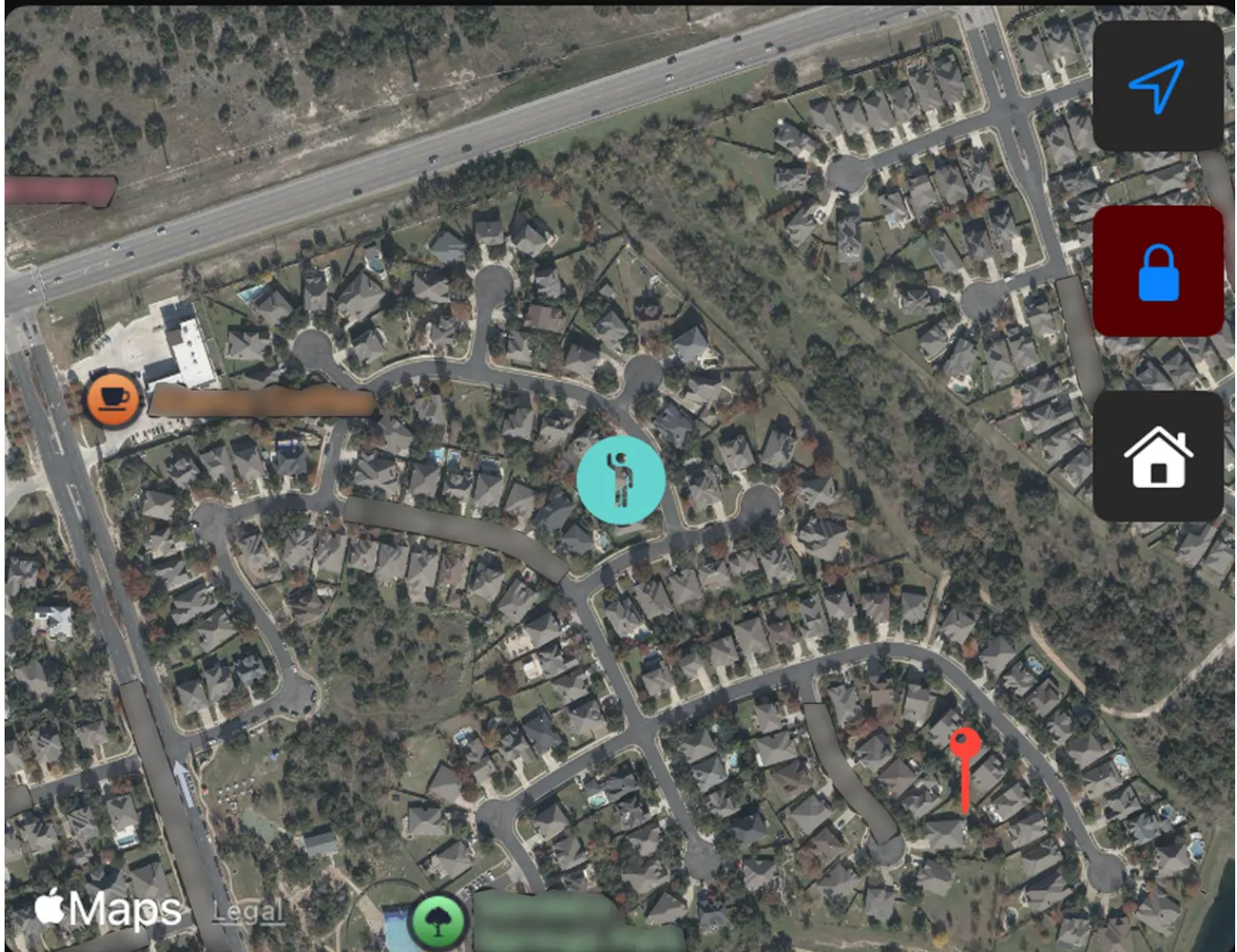
By signing up, you agree to our [user agreement](#) (including [class action waiver](#) and [arbitration provisions](#)), and acknowledge our [privacy policy](#).

US Attorney General Pam Bondi was on Fox News Monday talking about ICEBlock, when she spoke directly about Aaron, the app's sole developer. "We are looking at him," she said. "And he better watch out." Speaking alongside President Donald Trump outside a migrant detention center known as "Alligator Alcatraz" in Florida Tuesday, [Homeland Security](#) secretary Kristi Noem [said](#) the government was looking into prosecuting CNN.

"What they're doing is actively encouraging people to avoid law enforcement activities and operations and we're going to actually go after them and prosecute them," she said. "What they're doing, we believe, is illegal."

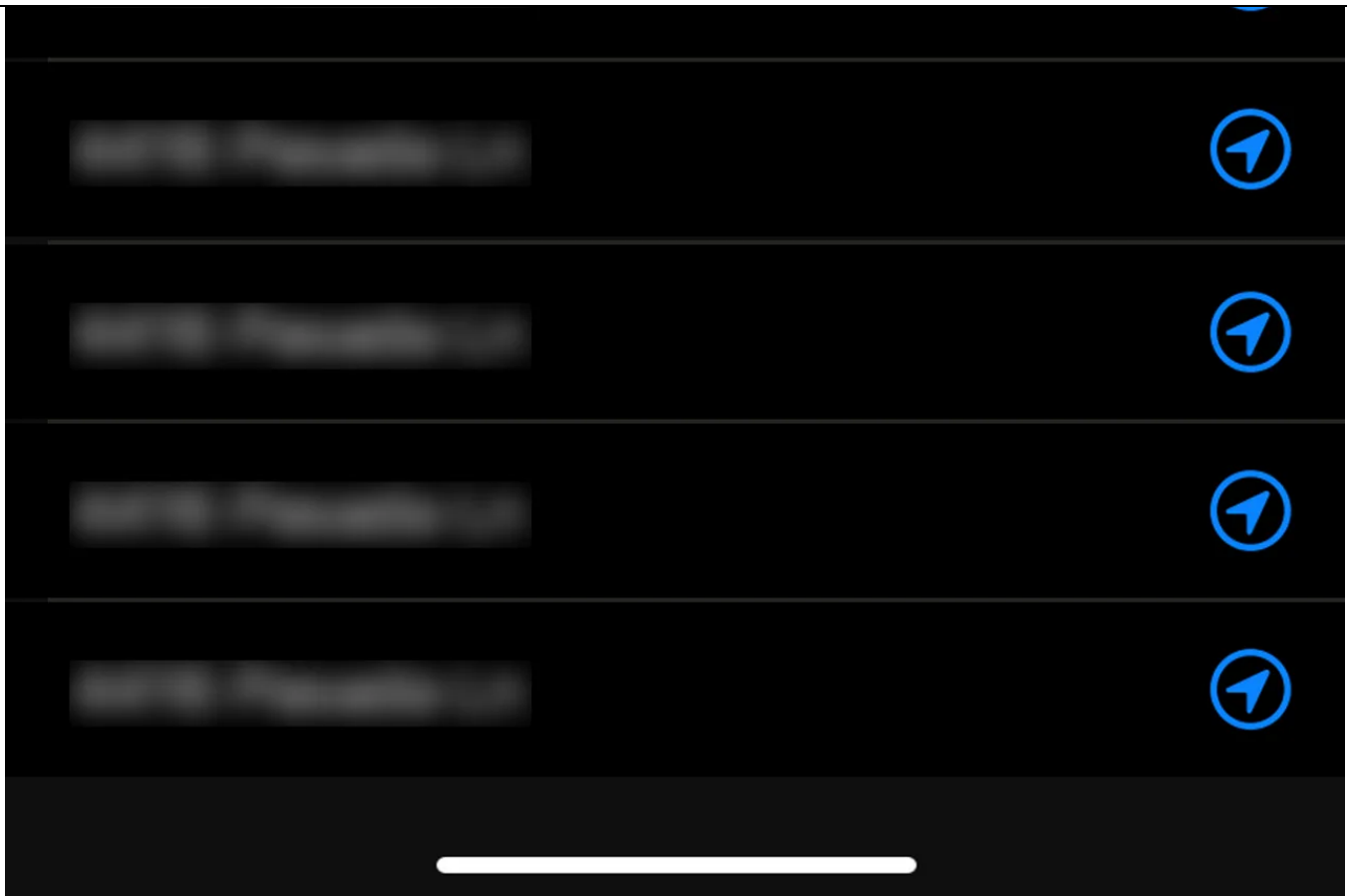


ICEBlock



# Reported Sightings:





ICEBlock allows users to alert each other when ICE agents are nearby. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ICEBLOCK

But legal experts tell WIRED that ICEBlock falls under protected speech. “That is as basic and uncontroversial a First Amendment principle as they come,” says Alex Abdo, the litigation director at the [Knight First Amendment Institute](#) at Columbia University. “So, it's pretty shocking to see federal law enforcement officials suggesting that there's anything here to investigate.”

Scott Hechinger, a [civil rights](#) attorney, says prosecuting the app’s creator would be illegal.

“Threatening people, in this case companies and projects, with arrest and retaliation for exercising their First Amendment rights is profoundly illegal and unconstitutional,” he says. He points to past media appearances from border czar Tom Homan, where Homan [condemned congresswoman Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#) for sharing information about the immigrant’s legal rights, as emblematic of the administration’s lack of respect for constitutionality.



comment. The White House did not immediately respond to WIRED's request for comment.

In the statement, Lyons called CNN's coverage of the app "reckless and irresponsible." When reached for comment, Emily Kuhn, senior vice president of communications at CNN, pointed WIRED to a [statement from the network](#) saying that reporting on the existence of an app is neither illegal nor an endorsement.

The Trump administration's rebukes of the app have also focused on the idea that it's placing ICE agents in danger. Responding to a question about a CNN report on ICEBlock Monday, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said "surely, it sounds like this would be an incitement of further violence against our ICE officers." She went on to say, "there's been a 500 percent increase in violence against ICE agents, law enforcement officers across the country who are just simply trying to do their jobs and remove public safety threats from our communities."

On June 20, the Department of Homeland Security put out a [press release](#) citing the purported 500 percent increase, however its link for the statistic directs users to a Breitbart article that just quotes the DHS without providing in-depth details to support the number.

"ICE and the Trump administration are under the misimpression that law enforcement in the United States is entitled to operate in secret," says Seth Stern, director of advocacy at [Freedom of the Press Foundation](#). Stern points to ICE agents wearing masks while operating in public and accusations by the administration targeted at journalists who report on ICE as examples of this "misimpression."

Aaron tells WIRED the app is about "informing, not obstructing." He describes a potential user interaction as someone walking around their neighborhood, then getting an alert on their phone saying that ICE has been spotted a few blocks away—with directions for safely getting home. By tapping the plus button in the

“We're pushing back against authoritarianism. We're pushing back against fascism,” he says. “They're gonna fire off hate rhetoric at you. They're gonna demonize everything you're doing. They're gonna threaten you.”

The app is part of a larger trend of people using social media and apps to resist the Trump administration's ramping up of immigration arrests. In early June, as protests began to swell in Los Angeles, multiple grassroots groups shared emergency alerts to local residents as ICE raids were happening across the city.

According to the Apple listing for ICEBlock, the app does not store any data on its users. Since it does not collect user data, Aaron doesn't know how many people have used the app in Los Angeles, for example, or even know where past sightings have been posted. Individual users can only see what's been reported within a five-mile radius and the sightings auto-delete after four hours.

The app is currently only available on iPhones. Based on his past interactions with Apple during ICEBlock's approval process, Aaron feels confident that it will remain available in the app store. “They've already reviewed it,” he says. “That's why they approved it.” Apple did not respond to requests for comment.

Aaron says ICEBlock will never have ads or a button asking for donations. For him, the simplicity of the app's interface is an intentional choice. “This is literally an early warning system,” he says. “So, how much do you want going on in that early warning system? Except to say, ‘Hey, something's coming up within your five-mile radius. Get the fuck out.’”