

Home > Military News

Federal Judge Releases Disabled Veteran From ICE Custody

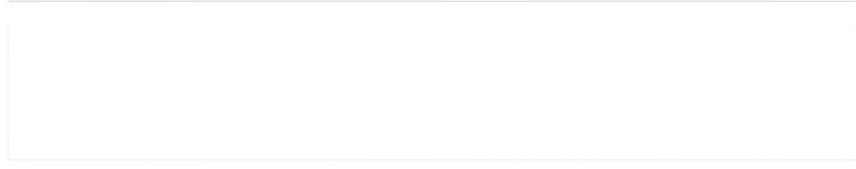


U.S. federal agents working for Immigration and Customs Enforcement detain immigrants and asylum-seekers reporting for immigration court proceedings at the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building's U.S. Immigration Court in New York City in July. (Dominic Gwinn/Middle East Images/AFP/Getty Images/TNS)

The Seattle Times | By Alexandra Yoon-Hendricks
Published December 23, 2025 at 9:27am ET



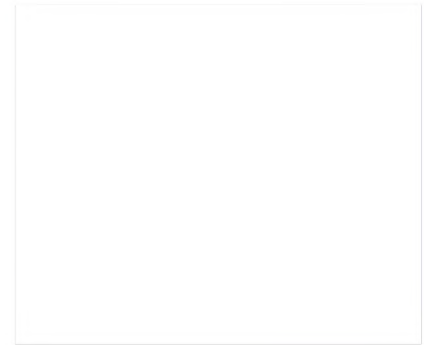
TACOMA — A federal judge on Monday morning ordered the immediate release of a disabled U.S. Army veteran who has been held at the Northwest ICE Processing Center in Tacoma, Washington since August.



Muhammad Zahid Chaudhry, who is originally from Pakistan and has been living in the United States since 2000, was detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement on Aug. 21 at the Tukwila U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office after completing a scheduled citizenship interview. Since then, Chaudhry has been experiencing serious medical issues because of a lack of treatment at the detention center, his family and advocates allege.

Military News




- Investigations and Features
- Army
- Navy
- Air Force
- Marine Corps
- Coast Guard
- Space Force
- Military Opinion



Select Service

- Army
- Marines
- Navy
- Air Force
- National Guard
- Coast Guard
- Space Force
- Spouse
- Login

Most Popular Military News

-  Federal Government Shutdown Grinds into a Second Week as Tempers Flare at the Capitol
-  At 50, He Survived Marine Boot Camp – Then Fought at Peleliu and Okinawa
-  Ukrainian Drones Attack Russian Cavalry Troops in Rare 21st-Century Encounter

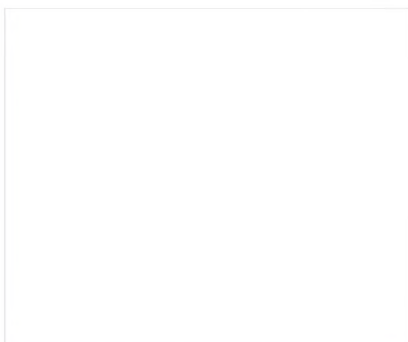
By around 5 p.m. Monday, Chaudhry had been released from the detention center and picked up by his wife, Melissa Chaudhry.

Reviewing Muhammad Zahid Chaudhry's habeas corpus petition seeking release from ICE custody, U.S. District Chief Judge David G. Estudillo told the courtroom Monday he found Chaudhry's detention unlawful. Under the order, Chaudhry will be allowed to return home while his ongoing immigration case proceeds.

"It's a good day for justice in America and yet this should have never have happened in the first place. If Government errors can put an Honorable, decorated Disabled American veteran in Detention for over 4 months, then no American is safe," Chaudhry said in a statement after he was released.

The federal judge, who was appointed by President Joe Biden in 2021, ordered Chaudhry's release on the basis of "the lack of process that was provided (to) detaining him in the first instance."

"Clearly somebody is not looking at this in the right way or in the right context when they're detaining individuals," Estudillo said. "The frustration is people are just not following the procedures that they're supposed to."



Estudillo told the courtroom he planned to file a written order within a few hours.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Michelle Lambert, representing the federal government, acknowledged during oral arguments that based on prior rulings in the district, Chaudhry should have received notification before his arrest so he would have the opportunity to challenge the basis of his detention.

In his written ruling, Estudillo said immigration enforcement officials may not re-detain Chaudhry unless he receives written notice, "along with an appropriate opportunity to respond to notice.

"We are grateful to the court for its attention today, we respect the judge, we respect the process, and we have faith in the rule of law," Melissa Chaudhry said outside the U.S. District Court in Tacoma to a crowd of supporters shortly after the hearing.

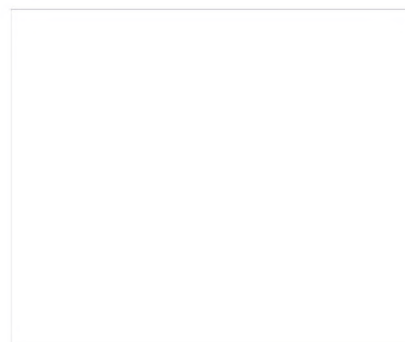
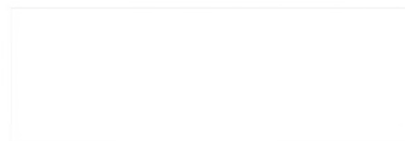
Muhammad Zahid Chaudhry's arrest in August sparked outrage among supporters, who describe him as an active community member with a history of service. He served on former Gov. Jay Inslee's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment, and is the president of the Veterans for Peace Olympia



When The Government Can Afford Everything Except The Essentials



Troops Will Miss Paychecks Next Week Without Action on the Government Shutdown



Latest Benefits Info

- [Should You Let the Military Set Aside Allotments from Your Pay?](#)
- [Tricare Select Coverage Details](#)
- [2026 Guide to Pay and Allowances for Military Service Members, Veterans and Retirees](#)
- [The Vietnam Veterans Who Fought for Modern PTSD Treatments](#)
- [The Cost of Skipping Sick Call: How Active-Duty Service Members Can Protect Future VA Claims](#)

[View More >](#)

More Military Headlines



Iran Army Chief Threatens Preemptive Attack Over 'Rhetoric' Targeting Country After Trump's Comments



US Forces Board Venezuela-Linked Sanctioned Oil Tanker in North Atlantic, US Official Says



Denmark and Greenland Seek Talks with Rubio After White House Says Again It Wants the Island

chapter.

Chaudhry received lawful permanent resident status in April 2001. He enlisted in the Washington Army National Guard the same year, and served until 2005. He was honorably discharged due to a back injury sustained while training to go to Iraq in 2003.

Before his detainment, Chaudhry lived in Lacey with his wife and their two children. Melissa Chaudhry ran for Congress in 2024 in Washington's 9th Congressional District.

Muhammad Zahid Chaudhry has been fighting to secure his citizenship in a cascade of litigation over nearly two decades, ultimately bringing his case before the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

He first applied for citizenship on the basis of his military service in April 2004. In his application, he noted he had a criminal conviction for fraud in Australia, where he lived before moving to the U.S., related to using a passport and credit card that wasn't his, according to court records.

That disclosure raised a red flag with immigration officials, who argued in court Chaudhry previously failed to mention those convictions in his tourist visa application, as well as in an interview related to his green-card application. Melissa Chaudhry said her husband has never broken the law in the U.S., and that the convictions in Australia carried a lenient sentence equivalent to paying a parking ticket.

In August 2008, an immigration judge denied Chaudhry's application for naturalization, and ICE moved to deport him the following year. In a number of legal filings, Chaudhry has fought back against the threat of deportation and the denial of his citizenship application.

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, which is reviewing Chaudhry's case, issued a stay of removal in 2020, preventing his deportation until the case concludes. That remains in effect.

"Because the circuit currently has that stay in place, there's no basis to detain," Estudillo said in court Monday.

Numerous health and human rights violations at the Tacoma detention center have been documented over the years by researchers and government agencies, including severe medical neglect, unsanitary food and swamplike water. People who have been held there report having limited access to basic hygiene supplies like soap and long wait times when they're in need of medical treatment.

From the bench, Estudillo expressed concern about Chaudhry's medical care at the detention center. The judge noted, for example, that Chaudhry has gone four months without being seen by an ophthalmologist despite having impaired vision because of his thyroid eye disease.

"After years of chronic pain and medical complications, his conditions today are severe, well documented, and incompatible with detention and deportation," said Micaela Romero, an organizer with Washington Community Action Network and a family friend of the Chaudhrys, outside the courthouse.



Should You Let the Military Set Aside Allotments from Your Pay?



Cuba Releases Details of 32 Officers Killed in US Strike on Venezuela as US Defends Attack

[View More >](#)

Army

- [The Battle of Hamel: Australian Soldiers Taught American Doughboys to Fight Germans in WWI](#)
- [Seminole Warriors Fought the US Military to a Stalemate in the Florida Swamps](#)
- ['I Never Want to See it Again.' Vietnam Soldier Recalls Deadly Napalm, Tet Offensive](#)

[View More >](#)

Air Force

- [Who Killed Dominic Marino? 7 Years Later, Murder of Disabled Veteran Baffles Police](#)
- [With Capture of Maduro, Trump Treads Into Uncharted Territory](#)
- [Vietnam POW, Subject of Memorable 'Burst of Joy' Photo Dies at 92](#)

[View More >](#)

Navy

- [Hegseth Censures Sen. Kelly After Warning About Following Illegal Orders](#)
- [How the US Captured Venezuelan Leader Nicolás Maduro](#)
- [With Capture of Maduro, Trump Treads Into Uncharted Territory](#)

[View More >](#)

Military Benefits Updates

- [Should You Let the Military Set Aside Allotments from Your Pay?](#)
- [2026 Guide to Pay and Allowances for Military Service Members, Veterans and Retirees](#)

Chaudhry's immigration status remains in the hands of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Estudillo noted that if the circuit were to lift the stay of removal, at that point, Chaudhry could be eligible for detention under U.S. immigration law.

Melissa Chaudhry said she expects the panel of appeals court judges to convene and review her husband's case in January.

"They could order him deported, they could order him naturalized back to 2003, we don't know" she said. "But he will be home with us when we find that out."

Material from The Seattle Times archives was used in this report.

© 2025 The Seattle Times. Visit www.seattletimes.com. Distributed by [Tribune Content Agency, LLC](#).



Related Topics: [Military Headlines](#), [Immigration & Citizenship](#), [Pakistan](#), [National Guard](#)

© Copyright 2026 The Seattle Times . All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

You May Also Like



Iran Army Chief Threatens Preemptive Attack Over 'Rhetoric' Targeting Country After Trump's Comments

Iran's army chief has threatened preemptive military action over the "rhetoric" targeting the Islamic Republic.



US Forces Board Venezuela-Linked Sanctioned Oil Tanker in North Atlantic, US Official Says

A U.S. official says U.S. forces have boarded a Venezuela-linked sanctioned oil tanker in the North Atlantic after pursuing...



Trump Admin Sued Over Offshore Project Impacting 500k New Yorkers' Electricity

Offshore wind projects that are more than half complete are currently being halted by the Department of the Interior for...



Denmark and Greenland Seek Talks with Rubio After White House Says Again It Wants the Island

Denmark and Greenland are seeking a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio after the Trump administration doubled...

- [The Vietnam Veterans Who Fought for Modern PTSD Treatments](#)

[View More >](#)

Marine Corps

- [Master Sergeant to First Sergeant: Marine Corps Revives Decades-Lost Flexibility](#)
- [Green Jacket Volunteers Help Veterans Succeed in Drug Treatment Courts](#)
- [The Korean Battle for Outpost Vegas: 1,000 Casualties, Two Medals of Honor, One Four-Legged Hero](#)

[View More >](#)

Coast Guard

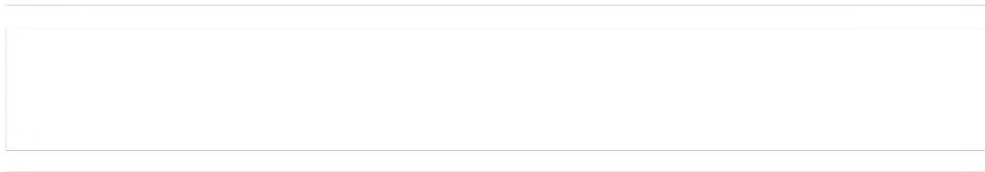
- [US Forces Board Venezuela-Linked Sanctioned Oil Tanker in North Atlantic, US Official Says](#)
- [Energy Impact of MARAD Takeover of Deepwater Ports From Coast Guard](#)
- [Coast Guard Searches for Survivors of Boat Strikes as Odds Diminish Days Later](#)

[View More >](#)

Entertainment

- [BioShock 4 Is Finally Coming: What's Confirmed, What's Leaked, and What's Gone Wrong](#)
- [The Best Movies Hitting Streaming in January 2026](#)
- [Battlefield 6 Players Are Furious Over 'Wacky Skins' and AI Art Claims](#)

[View More >](#)



Search Military.com GO →

NEWS

- [News Home](#)
- [Army](#)
- [Navy](#)
- [Air Force](#)
- [Marine Corps](#)
- [Coast Guard](#)
- [Space Force](#)
- [Military Podcasts](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Videos](#)

BENEFITS

- [Benefits Home](#)
- [Military Pay and Money](#)
- [GI Bill](#)
- [Veteran Health Care](#)
- [Tricare](#)
- [VA Loans](#)
- [Insurance](#)
- [Retirement](#)
- [VA eBenefits](#)

VETERAN JOBS

- [Veteran Job Search](#)
- [Upload Your Resume](#)
- [Veteran Employment Project](#)
- [Vet Friendly Employers](#)
- [Career Advice](#)

MILITARY LIFE

- [Military Life Home](#)
- [Money](#)
- [Off Duty](#)
- [Fitness](#)
- [Military Trivia Game](#)
- [Veterans Day](#)
- [Spouse & Family](#)
- [Deployment](#)
- [Military History](#)

DISCOUNTS

- [Discounts Home](#)
- [Featured Discounts](#)
- [Veterans Day Restaurant Discounts](#)
- [Dining](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Retail](#)
- [Insurance](#)
- [Services](#)
- [Auto](#)
- [Electronics](#)

JOIN THE MILITARY

- [Join the Military Home](#)
- [ASVAB](#)
- [Contact a Recruiter](#)
- [Military Fitness](#)
- [Benefits](#)



Military.com Network

[Air Force](#) | [Army](#) | [Coast Guard](#) | [Marine Corps](#) | [National Guard](#) | [Navy](#) | [Space Force](#)

About Military.com

[About Us & Press Room](#) | [RSS](#) | [Advertise with Us](#) | [Reprints & Permissions](#)

[Subscriptions](#) | [User Agreement](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Your Privacy Choices](#) | [Site Map](#)

Military & Veteran Journalism Fund

Need customer support?

Visit our Customer Support center for solutions or to contact us.

[Customer Support](#)

© 2026 Military Advantage | [AdChoices](#) 