

Irish woman released from U.S. immigration detention



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Washington, May 8, 2025 – Cliona Ward, a 54-year-old Irish citizen and long-time resident of Santa Cruz, California, has been released from U.S. immigration detention after spending 17 days in custody. Ward, who holds a valid green card until 2033, was detained upon returning from Ireland due to decades-old convictions that had been expunged at the state level but not federally recognized.

Ward's detention sparked significant public outcry in both Ireland and the United States.

Supporters, including Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris and U.S. Representative Jimmy Panetta, advocated for her release. A GoFundMe campaign launched by her family raised substantial funds to cover legal expenses.

After legal intervention, a judge ordered the federal recognition of the expungement of Ward's past convictions, leading to the termination of immigration proceedings against her. Her attorney, Erin Hall, emphasized the importance of aligning federal and state records to prevent such detentions.

Ward, who moved to the U.S. from Dublin at age 12, works for a nonprofit organization and is the primary caregiver for her chronically ill U.S.-citizen son. Her case underscores the complexities of immigration enforcement policies, particularly concerning legal residents with prior convictions.

Upon her release, Ward expressed gratitude for the widespread support and highlighted the emotional toll of her detention. She also voiced concern for others in similar situations, advocating for reforms to prevent future injustices.