

WASHINGTON STATE'S CONTINUED SHARING OF DRIVERS' INFORMATION WITH FEDERAL IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

tinyurl.com/NletsWA

Findings

Between August 2025 and July 17, 2026, University of Washington Center for Human Rights (UWCHR) has verified 58 cases in which immigration arrests occurred following federal agents' search of license plate numbers in the WA Department of Licensing (DOL) database via the data-sharing network Nlets. Although state authorities have restricted access to Nlets for certain ORIs, the data sharing continues.

DOL data sharing in Washington state

Today, immigrants living in the state of Washington feel increasingly afraid when driving, since our streets, highways and public roads have become frequent scenes of immigration control operations. These incidents, in which drivers are often stopped by masked officers driving unmarked vehicles, raise multiple human rights concerns: many arrests appear to have been made without a warrant; some have been violent; and even U.S. citizens have been detained. And unfortunately, this pattern of abuse is occurring with the help of two Washington state institutions: the Department of Licensing (DOL) and the Washington State Patrol.

UWCHR research has shown that federal agents routinely travel to areas frequented by immigrants and people of color, and run the license plates of vehicles they see through Nlets, allowing them to access the WA DOL database. There, they learn the names and addresses of the registered owners of vehicles before them, and run those names against their own databases to see if they believe the car's owner is "deportable"; if so, they often pull the car over within minutes. While state laws prohibit Washington agencies from providing information to assist in civil immigration enforcement, in all too many cases this is exactly what's happening. This occurs despite numerous previous revelations that the DOL was sharing driver data with federal immigration authorities, and despite multiple promises that this would stop.

It's time to demand a change.

What is Nlets?

Nlets is a 50-year-old national data-sharing system that connects law enforcement databases, allowing federal agencies like ICE or CBP to access WA Department of Licensing information. In Washington state, Nlets is administered by the Washington State Patrol via the data system ACCESS. Federal agents use Nlets to query the license plates of cars passing by to find information including the car's registered owner and their home address.

What is an ORI?

An ORI is a nine-character code that identifies the particular agency performing an Nlets query. Washington state officials have the power to restrict Nlets access to ORIs they believe are using this information for civil immigration purposes, and have done so in some cases. However, these actions taken have not stopped the abuse. UWCHR research has found that agents are now submitting their queries under different ORIs.

ROADSIDE ASSIST

Updated July 2026

CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

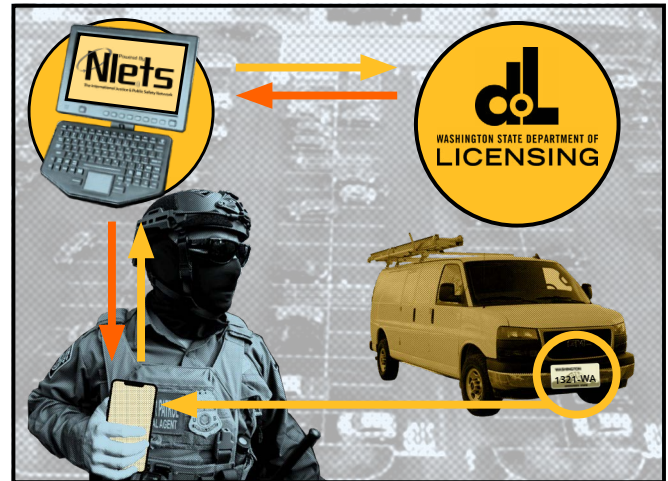
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How Nlets is used in roadside arrests

1. CBP/ICE surveillance: ICE and CBP agents surveil locations where they expect to find undocumented residents, or target vehicles they deem suspicious.
2. CBP/ICE searches license plate numbers in WA DOL data via Nlets: Agents run license plate numbers in Nlets, obtaining information from WA DOL via WA State Patrol's ACCESS—including name, address, vehicle registration information, and more.
3. CBP/ICE makes an arrest: DOL data can be used to cross reference an individual's immigration status. Agents can then proceed to arrest the driver while in traffic, or travel to their registered address to arrest them on a subsequent day.



Nlets/DOL query case study

In records obtained from the Washington State Patrol, shown here, we see a Vehicle Registration Query ("RQ") performed via Nlets/ACCESS on November 16, 2025 by an ICE ORI on the license plate of a Washington state resident; Washington DOL responds with the driver's personal information. The driver was subsequently arrested by ICE.

When compared with other documents obtained by UWCHR, this query was related to a WA resident who was in Gresham, OR for work, and had just left a Latino grocery store when ICE officers spotted him. The Nlets record shows an ORI associated with ICE then ran the license plates of his vehicle, obtaining his personal information from the WA DOL. ICE then ran his name through their own databases, determining his immigration status. They pulled over his vehicle and arrested him. He told UWCHR researchers that in the course of his arrest he was beaten by the agents. When a UWCHR researcher later visited him in the ICE detention center in Tacoma, his injuries, including the marks left by four taser blasts, were still visible on his body, and his eyesight had yet to return to normal.

```
** Message Record Number: 4059603
** Code 10(b)
** Date: 11/16/2025 9:48:56 AM
** UTCDate: 11/16/2025 5:48:56 PM
** MKE: RQ
** Event: Input Message
** Code 10(b)
** ORI: CAICE08T0
--MESSAGE--
```

The message key RQ refers to a Vehicle Registration Query.

This ORI belongs to ICE.

Code 10(b)

The redaction code 10(b) refers to personal information not including criminal history.

```
** Message Record Number: 40596032085906
** Code 10(b)
** Date: 11/16/2025 9:48:56 AM
** UTCDate: 11/16/2025 5:48:56 PM
** MKE: RQ
** Event: Output Message
** Code 10(b)
** ORI: WADOL0000
--MESSAGE--
```

This ORI shows Washington state DOL responds to ICE's query.