

Carpinteria's economy reels from impact of federal ICE actions, CIRC report says

Survey finds business losses, worker fear and staffing challenges across valley

BY CVN STAFF

The Carpinteria Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC) reported widespread economic and workplace disruptions tied to federal immigration enforcement activity, citing results from a recent survey of local businesses and agricultural operations.

According to the coalition, a bilingual nonprofit founded in 2025, 78% of respondents said their businesses, workers or customers have been negatively affected by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement activity or fear of it. Of those, 40% described the impact as significant and 38% as moderate.

The survey — conducted in March by CIRC volunteers and funded primarily by the city of Carpinteria, with additional support from the Fund for Santa Barbara — examined how immigration enforcement has affected worker recruitment, absenteeism, sales and workplace morale, according to CIRC.

More than half of respondents reported losing customers or revenue, while 47% cited increased stress and morale issues among employees. About 36% said workers were afraid to come to work, and 24% reported operational disruptions. Another 22% said they were struggling to hire or retain staff, the coalition said.

A smaller share, 9%, reported that employees had reduced their hours or left their jobs altogether.

Financial impacts were also reported. Forty percent of businesses surveyed said they experienced some level of monetary

loss, with 29% estimating losses under \$50,000. Smaller percentages reported losses exceeding \$50,000 or even \$250,000, according to the coalition. About 7% of respondents estimated revenue declines between 30% and 50%.

The coalition said the findings reflect trends seen elsewhere in California. It pointed to reporting by the Los Angeles Times, which cited research from the University of California, Merced showing significant economic effects from federal immigration raids. It also referenced data reported by CalMatters indicating tax receipts have dropped sharply in some communities reliant on immigrant labor.

The survey also asked business owners, office managers and employee representatives whether they felt prepared to respond if immigration officers appeared at their workplaces. It further sought input on what services or information would be most helpful, according to the coalition.

Project supervisor Isa Alarcón led the effort, recruiting and training a team of bilingual interns with ties to Carpinteria to conduct outreach and collect responses.

The coalition said its full report, including recommendations for the city on how to support employers and workers, is available upon request.

The Carpinteria Immigrant Rights Coalition said its mission is to support and advocate for immigrants in Carpinteria and surrounding communities through education, mutual aid and collaboration with local organizations and government agencies.

At a Glance:

ICE Impact Survey in Carpinteria

Who conducted it: Carpinteria Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC)

When: March 2026

Where: Carpinteria Valley businesses, offices and agricultural workplaces

Funding: City of Carpinteria (primary); Fund for Santa Barbara (support)

Key findings:

78% reported negative impacts tied to ICE activity or fear

40% significant impact

38% moderate impact

50%+ lost customers or revenue

47% reported increased employee stress and morale issues

36% said workers were afraid to come to work

24% experienced operational disruptions

22% faced hiring/retention challenges

9% reported workers reducing hours or leaving jobs

Financial impact:

40% reported financial losses

29% estimated losses under \$50,000

Smaller shares reported losses exceeding \$50,000 and \$250,000

7% reported revenue declines of 30%-50%

Other insights:

Businesses expressed need for guidance on interacting with ICE officers

Survey gathered input on helpful services, resources and information

Report: Available upon request from CIRC