# Irish woman with green card detained over decades-old convictions despite long US residency



An Irish woman who has legally resided in the United States for more than 40 years has been held by immigration officials for over a week due to a criminal record dating back nearly two decades. Cliona Ward, 54, was detained on 21 April at San Francisco airport after returning from a visit to Ireland, where she had been with her sick father. Ward is currently being held at an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in Tacoma, Washington.

Ward, who holds a green card, has convictions from 2007 and 2008 for drug possession. Her family has stated that they believed these convictions had been expunged. Ward’s sister, Orla Holladay, highlighted that the convictions stemmed from a period when Ward was struggling with addiction, but she has been sober for 20 years. Court documents reviewed by Newsweek list two felonies and four misdemeanours related to drug possession in her record. Holladay described her sister as “a person with a painful past” and emphasised that Ward had fulfilled her obligations and become a valued member of her community, working for a non-profit organisation, paying taxes, and caring for her chronically ill son, a US citizen.

Ward moved to the United States from Dublin as a child and attended the University of California, Santa Cruz. During her recent detention, she was shackled while being transported, which, according to her sister, left her feeling “shamed and demoralised.” The conditions at the detention facility are reported to be harsh, although Ward has found some support among other detainees despite language barriers.

Earlier this year, in March, Ward was stopped and held for three days at Seattle airport after accompanying her stepmother to Ireland to visit their father, who suffers from dementia. She was released to gather documentation relating to the allegedly expunged convictions but was re-detained upon returning to the US at San Francisco airport on 21 April.

A crowdfunding campaign initiated by Holladay to raise funds for legal representation had, by Monday afternoon, raised over $23,000 (£17,200). Erin Hall, a Seattle-based attorney, is scheduled to have an initial consultation with Ward on Monday, with the woman’s immigration hearing set for 7 May.

The detention of Ward has drawn official attention, with Ireland’s taoiseach, Micheál Martin, expressing concern. Speaking to RTÉ, he said, “Where people have green cards and citizenship rights there shouldn’t be an issue so we will be pursuing this on a bilateral basis to make sure that those who are legitimately entitled to be in the US are free from any challenges or difficulties of this kind.” Ireland’s department of foreign affairs is also providing consular support.

Jimmy Panetta, a Democratic US representative from California, called the situation “unfathomable,” criticising the use of decades-old convictions, reportedly expunged, as grounds for deporting a legal permanent resident who contributes positively to society.

This case forms part of a broader context of intensified immigration enforcement under President Donald Trump’s administration, which won the 2024 election promising “the largest deportation operation in American history.” This crackdown has extended to documented immigrants, including green card holders and naturalised citizens. Recent cases illustrating this trend include Canadian Jasmine Mooney, detained for two weeks over a work visa issue; German tourist Jessica Brösche, held for over six weeks including solitary confinement related to suspicions about working illegally as a tattoo artist; and British graphic artist Rebecca Burke, detained for three weeks due to a visa mix-up.

The Guardian reports that Ward’s family and legal team are currently involved in ongoing efforts to secure her release and resolve her immigration status.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.thedailybeast.com/irish-woman-legally-living-in-us-detained-by-ice-at-san-francisco-airport/> - This article corroborates Cliona Ward's detention by ICE at San Francisco Airport and her current detention at a facility in Tacoma, Washington. It also highlights concerns from political figures regarding her case.
* <https://www.irishecho.com/2025/4/legally-resident-irish-woman-detained-by-ice> - This article supports the information about Cliona Ward being detained due to past drug possession charges and her current legal situation, including her upcoming hearing.
* <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/family-speaks-out-santa-cruz-woman-green-card-holder-detained-sfo/3850763/> - This article provides details about Cliona Ward's detention and the family's response to her situation, including her sister's comments on her past and current legal status.
* <https://www.rte.ie/news/us/2025/0428/1509908-cliona-ward/> - This article confirms Cliona Ward's detention at the Northwest Detention Centre in Tacoma and provides context regarding her background and legal situation.
* <https://www.irishcentral.com/news/cliona-ward-irish> - This article supports the details about Cliona Ward's convictions, her expunged records, and her green card status, as well as the efforts by her family and legal team.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source is not directly accessible for verification, but it is mentioned as providing additional context on Cliona Ward's case.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/28/irish-woman-cliona-ward-us-detained-immigration> - Please view link - unable to able to access data