

NEWSWEEK: Under Siege': Minneapolis Business Community Grapples With ICE Surge

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Members of the Minneapolis business community have shared the challenges facing restaurants, stores and other establishments amid the ongoing immigration enforcement actions in the city.

The operation, dubbed "Metro Surge," began in December and has seen thousands of federal agents deployed across [Minnesota](#), resulting in thousands of arrests, clashes with demonstrators and growing demands from local officials for a rapid de-escalation of enforcement activities.

Following the deaths of [Renée Good](#) and [Alex Pretti](#)—U.S. citizens shot by federal agents only weeks apart—protests against the operation have intensified, with lawmakers from both parties warning of the [deteriorating safety situation](#) and businesses now saying that Metro Surge has pushed the local community to a breaking point.

ICE Actions 'Devastating' the Small Business Community

"Fear and uncertainty are crippling our local economy," said Rebecca Sorensen, the director of the 50th & France Business Association, a trade group representing those in Edina and Minneapolis.

"Small businesses cannot survive when workers are afraid, customers stay home, and entire communities feel targeted. We need this to stop," she told *Newsweek*. "The strain we are living with is unsustainable, and it is devastating the small businesses that anchor our neighborhoods."

Newsweek contacted the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and [Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#) (ICE) for comment via email.

Some major corporations with headquarters in Minnesota—including Target and Best Buy—[have spoken out](#) over the "tragic loss of life" that has already resulted from Metro Surge. A letter released by the state's Chamber of Commerce this week, and signed by over 60 businesses and CEOs, warned that the ICE operation had created "widespread disruption." The signatories added that their commitment to building up the state's business community was unshaken.

But small businesses appear less optimistic about navigating the current situation.

Sorensen said businesses in the ordinarily bustling 50th & France commercial district "noticed a clear turning point" three weeks ago, when Operation Metro Surge was intensified with the deployment of an additional 2,000 agents to the Minneapolis area. Since then, the district has seen a 40-45 percent decline in January sales, and the impacts, she said, have extended "far beyond revenue."

"U.S. citizens are being arrested, workers are afraid to come to their jobs, restaurants are struggling to staff shifts, and traumatized customers are staying home—significantly reducing regular foot traffic," Sorensen said. "People aren't celebrating, dining out, or even running routine errands. And when they do venture out, they are acutely aware of who is missing. Our diverse community is noticeably absent."

Kevin Brown—the president of the Seward Civic and Commerce Association, a nonprofit that supports businesses in central Minneapolis—told *Newsweek* the financial effects so far seen were "almost worse than during COVID."

"Streets are empty, parking lots empty. Nobody's going out," he said, adding, "Many people, even white U.S. citizens, don't want to leave their houses anymore."

"Almost every business with more than a handful of employees" is reporting worker absences, Brown said, "or employees taken while observing ICE agents, or employees without legal status taken [and] never heard from again."



Federal agents grab a woman and drag her away from her car, days after an ICE agent fatally shot Renee Nicole Good, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Tuesday January 13, 2026 (Reuters)

'City Under Siege'

One business owner in central Minneapolis spoke with *Newsweek* on the condition of anonymity out of "fear of retaliation" from federal immigration authorities, after seeing reports of others who allegedly faced reprisals from DHS or ICE after voicing their opposition to Metro Surge.

The owner said the operation had "very negatively affected" business, with workers "afraid to leave their homes" and an astounding amount of staff time now being wasted on planning how to navigate the situation. "We follow all federal employment laws, but literally just having brown skin is enough to possibly get you detained by ICE, and that's enough of a deterrent for customers and employees alike to come out," the person said.

"The federal government has literally put the city under siege and are not playing by their own rules, requiring insane measures to be taken, like adding deadbolts to doors that have never needed to be locked during operation," they added.

While several lawmakers have called for an end to Metro Surge, and Minnesota Governor [Tim Walz](#) has said he held a productive call with the president regarding potentially reducing the number of agents deployed to the Twin Cities, no formal end date for the operation has been announced.

With similar experiences being reported by their business partners, the individual told *Newsweek* that, barring some sort of stimulus or financial assistance, "I can only imagine we are weeks away from a long string of permanent closures."

"Talk about a traumatizing experience," they added.

Brown said the situation, while perilous for much of the community, had also seen "small business owners coming together to support each other, offer mutual aid, share strategies and tactics on how to protect our employees and customers, and figuring out what our legal rights are in trying to keep ICE operations from interfering with our businesses."

"This is a crisis in our city as impactful as COVID and almost more frightening than the riots over George Floyd's murder," he said. "The only thing that's keeping us going is the community coming together."