

British Columbia

U.S. government civil rights watchdog investigating Canadian border stops

'Let's get answers and make sure it never happens again'

[Yvette Brend](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jan 09, 2020 12:55 PM PT | Last Updated: January 9



U.S. Rep. Pramila Jayapal says the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties is investigating prolonged border stops that affected 60 to 200 Iranian-Americans crossing into Washington state from Canada. (Reuters)

[comments](#) 

U.S. congresswoman Pramila Jayapal says she's confirmed that the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties is investigating reports of Iranian-Americans being stopped and questioned last weekend at the border between Washington state and B.C.

Jayapal's spokesperson, Subhan Cheema, confirmed on Wednesday that the civil-rights office verbally confirmed to Jayapal's office the probe will involve investigators travelling to Washington state to gather details.

The [civil-rights office is tasked with looking into](#) any complaints of abuses by Homeland Security personnel.

Jayapal and other human rights groups condemned the up to 12-hour detentions of more than 60 Iranian-Americans last Saturday at the Blaine, Wash., border crossing.

Most of the border crossers who were stopped and delayed appeared to have U.S. passports and many were cleared for Nexus cards.

- [**Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal accuses U.S. border security of targeting Iranians in Blaine, Wash.**](#)
- [**Trudeau says evidence indicates Iranian missile brought down Ukrainian flight**](#)

Jayapal lauded those willing to tell their personal experiences to illustrate the details of the incidents.

"An important step forward thanks to the courage of those who spoke up to tell their story and our community's collective ability to quickly draw attention to this. Let's get answers and make sure it never happens again," Jayapal said in a [news release](#).



Dozens of people, mostly of Iranian descent, were stopped in extra long checks at the Blaine, Wash., border crossing on Jan. 4, 2020, according to witnesses. (Elaine Thompson/Associated Press)

She and other human rights groups condemned the up to 12-hour detentions of more than 60 Iranian-Americans last Saturday at the Blaine, Wash., border crossing.

They wrote a joint letter to the administration demanding more information about the screenings over the Jan. 4 weekend. The letter requested copies of all "directives, orders, guidance, instructions, musters, whether verbal or in writing, or other documents and communications" issued to border officials.

- [**15 people with ties to B.C. confirmed dead in Iran plane crash**](#)
- [**VIDEO Flight 752: The crash, the passengers, the investigation, Canada's response**](#)

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency has said nobody was detained because of their background, and the delays at the border were related to staffing issues and a pop concert that large groups of Iranian-Americans were attending.

But Jayapal and human rights advocates countered, saying it seemed border officials had received some sort of "directive" to target people of Iranian heritage, given reports that up to 200 Iranians were affected by the border incidents.

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