
THE PEOPLE'S RECORD



A Report on the People's Hearing on
Immigration Enforcement in Minnesota

March 10, 2026





Above, Minneapolis, Minnesota - January 31, 2026. ©John Moore / Getty Images



CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	2
Executive Summary	3
Key Findings	4
Recommendations to Congress and federal agencies for Ensuring DHS Oversight and Accountability:	5
Operation Metro Surge: A Civil Rights Moment in Immigration Enforcement	6
Context: Immigration Enforcement under the Current Administration	8
About the Hearing	10
Findings from the People’s Hearing	11
Abusive Enforcement Practices and Excessive Use of Force	11
Community Response and Constitutional Observers	13
Due Process and Legal Infringements	14
Detention System and Conditions	17
Mental Health and Community Harm	19
The People’s Key Findings	22
The People’s Recommendations	24
Endnotes	26
Appendices	27
Agenda	27
Hearing Transcript	28

Above, Two people at the memorial to Alex Pretti who was shot and killed by two United States Customs and Border Protection officers on January 24, 2026 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The black banner states: “Rest In Power Alex, Any Righteous Person Would Have Done The Same.” This memorial on Nicollet Avenue South is the site where Alex Pretti was shot. ©Todd Strand / Alamy

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report of the People's Hearing on Immigration Enforcement in Minnesota was made possible by organizations and individuals with the courage and determination to document publicly and for the record the real story of Operation Metro Surge, the largest-ever federal immigration enforcement operation by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The operation terrorized the Twin Cities and beyond. But Minnesotans fought back, uniting to document the daily abuses, support their neighbors, help keep them safe, locate those who were detained and “disappeared,” and protest this 100-day surge, even though they understood that their actions put them in danger. This hearing happened because of their bravery and their willingness to create this very public record, which now provides direct reports on specific civil rights violations, the impact on families and children, the community response by organizations and individuals, and the essential — and often dangerous — role of community observers. Because of them, this report and transcript document a clear pattern of willful violation of the constitutional rights of Minnesotans, the violent arrest and detention of residents regardless of their immigration status, and interference with lawful observers that ultimately led to two deaths and multiple injuries.

Local organizations played an essential role in shaping the focus of the hearing, convening affected communities, and providing testimony. We acknowledge and commend their critical contributions to the public understanding of the dangers of large-scale immigration “enforcement” operations like Operation Metro Surge. A special thanks is owed to the following organizations for their leadership and support:

CLUES (Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio)
Immigration Defense Network
Unidos Minnesota and its Monarca project
COPAL (Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Acción Latina)

We also appreciate the elected officials who took the time to share their insights during the hearing:

Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison
Saint Paul Mayor Kaohly Her
Columbia Heights Mayor Amada Marquez Simula
Saint Paul City Council member Molly Coleman
Saint Paul City Council Vice President HwaJeong Kim

Moderated by **Rochelle Garza, Chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights**, this first of its kind People's Hearing on Immigration Enforcement was organized and sponsored by:

Hispanic Federation
Miranda Family
Latino Victory Foundation
Texas Civil Rights Project

Most important, we acknowledge the many individuals — some named in the media, others known only to family and friends — who suffered because of Operation Metro Surge, losing their safety, their freedom, and sometimes their lives.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Operation Metro Surge began in December 2025 as a large-scale federal immigration enforcement operation in Minnesota and was described by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and White House leadership as the largest effort of its kind. About 4,000 federal agents were deployed across the Twin Cities and later statewide, resulting in nearly 4,000 arrests, including children as young as 2 years old booked into family detention centers, and a sustained presence of armed and masked units in neighborhoods, workplaces, and public spaces. This operation resulted in deaths, unlawful detentions, and widespread civil rights violations with no meaningful federal accountability to date. DHS announced on February 12 that the operation had ended, with most federal agents redeployed by early March, but the effects on the Twin Cities and the state as a whole remain far-reaching.

**Nearly
4,000 arrests
reported during
the 100 days of
the Surge**

[Deportation Data Project]

This report draws from testimony presented during the People's Hearing on Immigration Enforcement, along with supporting documentation, legal filings, and community-based evidence. It documents patterns over multiple accounts to provide a clear record of how enforcement practices were experienced on the ground during and after the surge.

Across testimony, several consistent findings emerged. Enforcement actions expanded in scale and intensity without public accountability. Individuals were detained despite valid documentation showing they were legally present, denied access to legal counsel, and in some cases became difficult to locate after being taken into custody. Conditions within detention facilities and the use of interstate transfers further restricted access to legal resources and support services. Testimony also described the fatal shootings of two U.S. citizens and a lack of independent and transparent investigations into those deaths, as well as threats and violence against many other constitutional observers. These actions produced widespread mental health impacts on children and families regardless of their immigration status. Significant economic disruption was also reported across the state. In a survey of Latino-owned businesses by the Latino Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota, 86% reported being directly impacted, 44% had temporarily closed, 28% had reduced services, and more than half reported losing over 50% of their revenue.

**Operation
resulted in
widespread civil
rights violations
with no federal
accountability**

The record reveals deeply troubling actions and results, including consistent and systemic violations of due process and constitutional rights that have harmed thousands of Minnesotans, and a culture of impunity at ICE that has prevented serious operational oversight and accountability.

The People’s Hearing led to the following key findings and recommendations:

KEY FINDINGS:

1. Escalation of immigration enforcement actions is causing widespread disruption and harm.

2. Enforcement practices are being carried out without accountability or federal oversight.

3. Due process protections enshrined in law and in the Constitution are being denied in practice.

4. Individuals are being effectively “disappeared” within the system following detention.

5. Detention conditions and practices have resulted in deaths and restricted individuals’ ability to exercise their rights.

6. Enforcement practices are causing lasting mental health harm to families and communities.

7. The First Amendment free speech rights of observers have been consistently violated, resulting in improper arrests, use of force, injury and the death of U.S. citizens.

8. Local economies and small businesses are being negatively affected.



“So, what can communities do?... First, know how your local police interact with ICE.... Your tax dollars do not have to fund a pipeline from local police to federal immigration enforcement. ... Second, if ICE tries to place a detention facility in your community, fight it... demand inspection rights... make them answer for what happens inside....Third, follow the money. Operation Metro Surge cost an estimated \$18 million a week. While people in many states cannot afford groceries, gas, or a doctor’s visit, ask your elected officials what you are buying with that money and whether it is making anyone safer. Fourth and certainly not least, fund legal defense, including *habeas* representation. A *habeas* petition forces the government to bring a person before a court and justify why they are being held...”

– Testimony of Aarti Kohli
Executive Director
Asian Law Caucus

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CONGRESS AND FEDERAL AGENCIES FOR ENSURING DHS OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

1. Conduct a full and independent investigation into Operation Metro Surge.

2. Establish independent oversight and public reporting requirements for immigration enforcement operations.

3. Protect the constitutional rights of both targeted individuals and observers during enforcement actions.

4. Strengthen and enforce due process protections and establish reliable tracking systems for detained individuals.

5. Reform detention practices and fully enforce standards.

6. Limit the use of interstate transfers.

7. Support community recovery and address the broader impacts of enforcement on families and local economies.

These findings, conclusions, and recommendations hold urgent significance not only for the residents of Minnesota but also for other metropolitan areas likely to face similar enforcement “surges.” Without meaningful changes to DHS and ICE policies, practices, and accountability, the detrimental experiences endured by both citizens and immigrants could be replicated in cities and states across the nation. It is imperative that we raise public awareness and demand lawful and humane treatment to foster positive change. Minnesotans should take pride in how they came together during one of the most challenging times in our recent history, and their strength and resilience can serve as a catalyst and guide for how communities can unite to safeguard our democracy and uphold the principles of our Constitution for everyone.



OPERATION METRO SURGE: A Civil Rights Moment in Immigration Enforcement

“The largest DHS operation ever is happening right now in Minnesota.”

DHS, post on X,
January 6, 2026

Moments of expanded enforcement authority are not new in American history. As noted by historian Dr. Yohuru Williams during the hearing, “history does not repeat itself, but it often echoes.” Periods of heightened enforcement, particularly in response to national anxiety or political pressure, have repeatedly raised fundamental questions about how the United States balances government power with the protection of civil rights and civil liberties.

Across different periods, these moments have often been justified as necessary responses to urgent threats. During World War I, laws such as the Espionage Act and Sedition Act were used to silence dissent and target immigrant communities. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, more than 120,000 Japanese Americans, most of them U.S. citizens, were forcibly removed and incarcerated without individual evidence of wrongdoing. In both cases, actions taken in the name of security were later recognized as egregious violations of constitutional rights.

A consistent lesson across these moments is the role that communities play in documenting what is happening on the ground. Civil rights protections have often advanced not only through legal challenges, but also through the work of individuals and communities who documented arrests, abuses, and patterns of enforcement. These records, whether through testimony, reporting, or community documentation, have been essential to later efforts to secure accountability and reform.

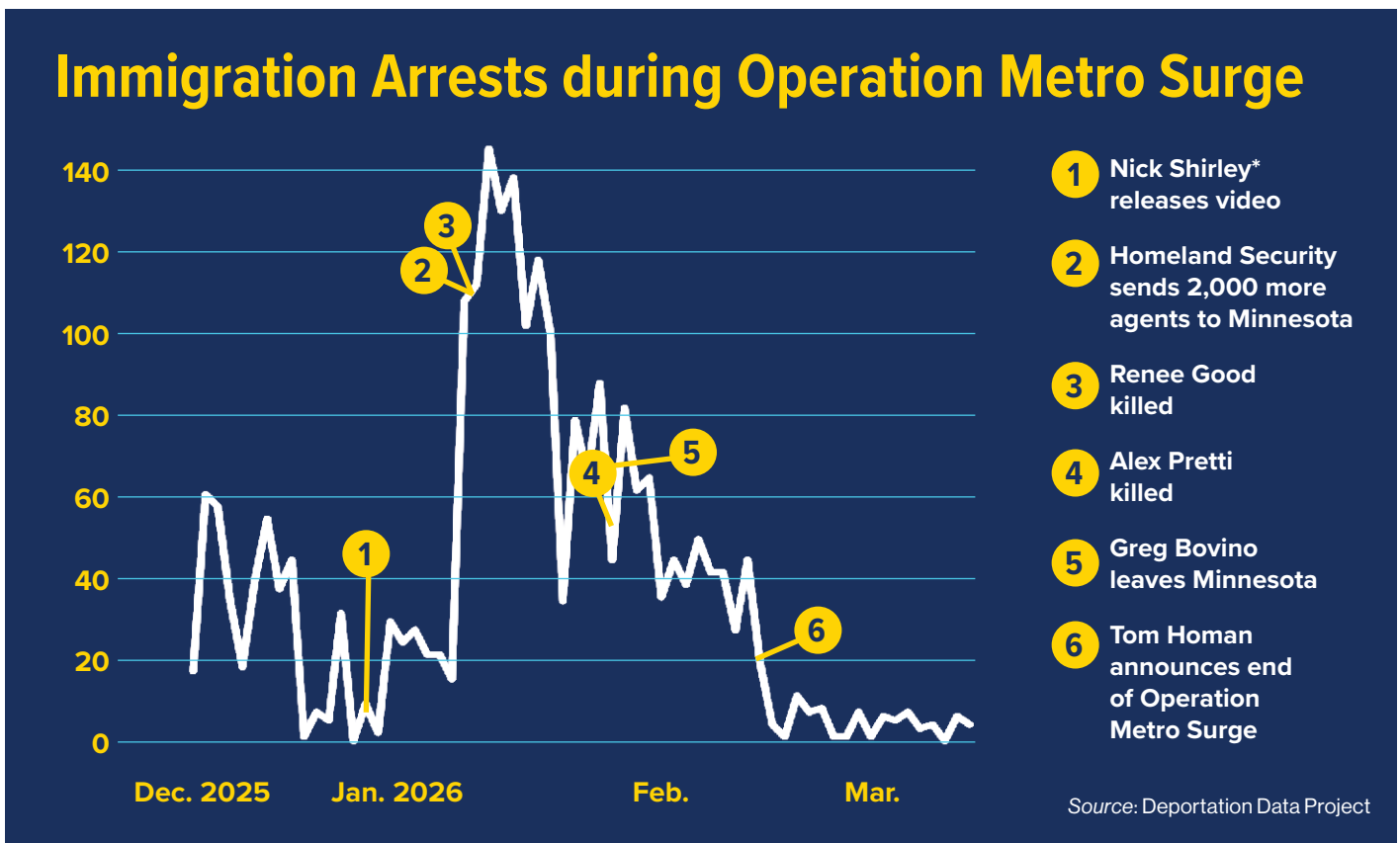
Public hearings are part of that tradition. They create space for individuals to share their experiences, ensure that those experiences become part of the public record, and provide policymakers, institutions, and the broader public with a clearer understanding of how enforcement policies are carried out in practice.

Operation Metro Surge, which began in December 2025, represents one of the most significant recent examples of expanded immigration enforcement. The operation, described by the Department of Homeland Security as the largest immigration enforcement effort of its kind, began in the Twin Cities and expanded across the state. It involved thousands of federal agents and resulted in thousands of arrests, alongside widespread disruption to daily life, including impacts on schools, businesses, and community stability.

Above, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers check the documentation of a construction worker during a random stop in Minneapolis, Minnesota on Friday, January 9, 2026. ©Craig Lassig/UPI/Alamy Live News



Over 100 days, from December 1, 2025 through March 10 2026, DHS arrested an average of almost 40 people a day, with the level of arrests highest in early January, soon after Renee Good was killed and the number of agents increased!



As in other moments in American history, the full impact of these actions extends beyond the stated goals of enforcement. This report documents how these policies were experienced on the ground, drawing from testimony provided during the People’s Hearing to ensure that those experiences are preserved as part of the public record.

* Nick Shirley is a right-wing YouTuber and influencer whose December 26, 2025 video alleged widespread fraud at Somali-run child care centers in Minnesota. The allegations were unsubstantiated but led to the freezing of federal funds for centers and an increased DHS and FBI presence in Minnesota. State investigators found no evidence of fraud at the child care centers Shirley visited. Above, Federal Agents in Minneapolis, MN, left: ©Craig Lassig/UPI/Alamy Live News; right: ©Chad Davis

CONTEXT:

Immigration Enforcement under the Current Administration

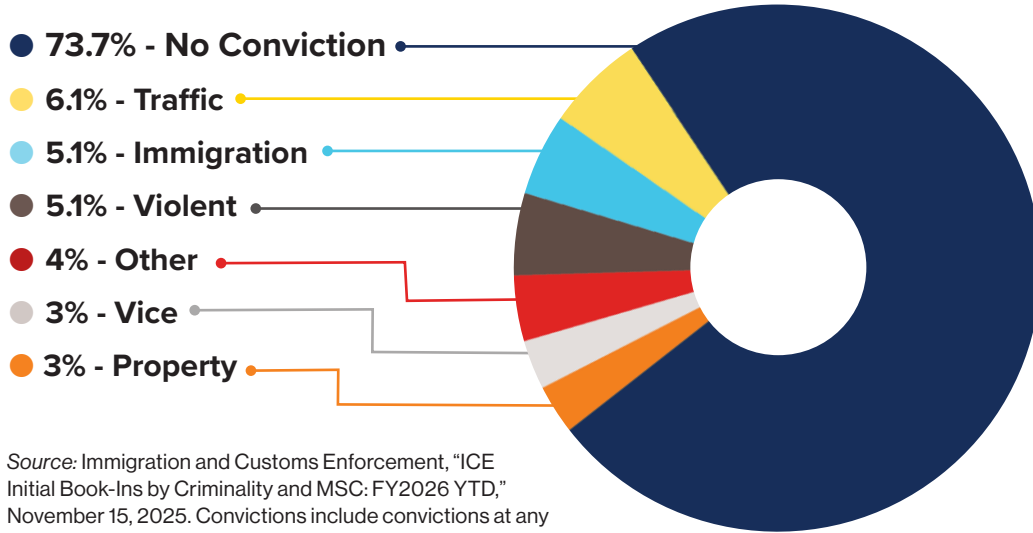
The second Trump administration is attempting the greatest deportation of immigrants, documented and undocumented, in U.S. history, through arrests, detention, ending of most asylum opportunities, eliminating due process, and threats and violence against both immigrants and their supporters. One and a half million immigrants have lost their Temporary Protected Status (TPS) since the Trump administration came into power. DHS statistics indicate that in 2025, ICE made over 328,000 arrests, and the number of people in detention rose from 40,000 in January 2025 to 73,000 in mid-January 2026 and 73,400 by the end of March.² More than 100 new detention centers have been opened and many more are planned. Some are tent camps or hastily converted facilities, often isolated. Most are overcrowded, and detainees lack medical care and access to legal representation. The vast majority are run by private contractors. Conditions are often inhumane at best, and there is little oversight. At least 23 people died in ICE detention facilities in the first five months of Fiscal Year 2026, more than in any *full* year since 2004.³

Arrests of people with no criminal record grew by 2,450% in 2025, according to an analysis of DHS data by the American Immigration Council, fueled by “increases in tactics like ‘at-large’ arrests, roving patrols, worksite raids, and re-arrests of people attending immigration court hearings or ICE check-ins.”⁴ There has been a 600% increase in such “at large” arrests by federal law enforcement officers. About 3,800 minors were booked into family detention centers from January to October 2025, about 2,600 of them by ICE agents, which means they were probably detained inside the U.S., not at the border.⁵ An analysis by TRAC Immigration found that 97% of new detainees in the Chicago “Operation Midway Blitz” that preceded Operation Metro Surge had no criminal conviction.⁶ A review of ICE book-ins nationally from October 1 through November 15, 2025 shows that 73% had no criminal conviction, and 47% had no charge or conviction. Only 5% of those detained had a violent criminal conviction; most frequent convictions were for traffic offenses (6%) and immigration violations (5%).⁷ The administration has fired or forced out almost 100 immigration judges nationwide, according to an NPR story on January 13, 2026, leaving the country with less than half the number of judges it had a year ago.⁸ This is contributing to historic court backlogs, and recent directives call for terminating some asylum claims with no hearings and using an expedited deportation process that minimizes due process.

The complexity of immigration laws and policies and immigrants’ lack of familiarity with the system, frequently combined with limited English fluency, leave detainees facing deportation with little hope without legal help. Yet unlike criminal defendants, detainees have no right to counsel, and more than half of those facing deportation have none. According to the ACLU, legal representation makes a detainee seven times more likely to be released from detention and ten times more likely to win their case.⁹ The Founding Executive Director of the Abundant Futures Fund, Mayra Peters-Quintero, has said that “The only thing between an individual and quick deportation,” including being sent to a prison outside the U.S. or to a country with which they have no connection, “is a lawyer.”¹⁰ According to DHS, more than 675,000 people were deported in 2025. DHS has also reported that 1.9 million immigrants have “self-deported,” although those numbers are based on limited data. The federal government’s deportation efforts are having a very real and devastating impact on the nation’s immigrant population. The American Immigration Council analysis found that, “As of November 2025, for every person released from ICE detention pending a hearing or after being granted relief, 14.3 people were deported directly from ICE custody.”¹¹

**At least 23
people died in
ICE detention
facilities in the
first five months
of Fiscal Year
2026**

ICE book-ins into custody, by most serious conviction FY 2026, OCTOBER 1 – NOVEMBER 15, 2025



Source: Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "ICE Initial Book-Ins by Criminality and MSC: FY2026 YTD," November 15, 2025. Convictions include convictions at any time, not just during the period listed. CATO Institute



Above, detainees behind a security window at an ICE processing center at 1 Federal Drive in Minneapolis, MN, on Jan. 6, 2026. *Blurred to protect identities.*
© American Photo Archive



ABOUT THE HEARING

The People's Hearing on Immigration Enforcement was held on Tuesday, March 10, 2026, at the offices of Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES) in St. Paul, Minnesota. The hearing brought together community members, advocates, public officials, and civil rights leaders to document experiences with immigration enforcement and their impact on civil and human rights. A press conference before the hearing was held at the Minnesota State Capitol in St. Paul.

The hearing was structured across multiple panels and included testimony from 28 speakers representing a range of perspectives, including impacted individuals and families, local leaders, educators, legal advocates, and national experts. A livestream of the hearing was made publicly available to ensure broader access and transparency.

The purpose of the hearing was to create a public record of lived experiences that are often not reflected in official accounts of immigration enforcement. Through testimony, participants documented patterns, raised concerns, and provided firsthand accounts of how enforcement practices are affecting communities in Minnesota.

The hearing draws on a longstanding civil rights tradition of public fact finding and record building that has historically informed federal oversight and accountability efforts. By placing these experiences into the public record, the hearing contributes to greater transparency and understanding of how policies are experienced on the ground.

The People's Hearing was convened by civil rights leaders, community organizations, impacted families, and public officials committed to advancing constitutional accountability in federal immigration enforcement. The following organizations were central to shaping the focus of the hearing, convening affected communities, and providing testimony: **CLUES, Immigration Defense Network, UNIDOS MN, and COPAL.** National organizations and leaders involved in organizing and sponsoring the People's Hearing include **Hispanic Federation, Miranda Family, Latino Victory Foundation, and Texas Civil Rights Project.** **Rochelle Garza** was invited to participate and chaired the hearing in her official capacity as Chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.



FINDINGS FROM THE PEOPLE'S HEARING

Abusive Enforcement Practices and Excessive Use of Force

Witnesses described enforcement in Minnesota as large-scale, fast moving, and highly visible, with a consistent show of force that created confusion for people caught in it, including accounts of serious injuries and fatal encounters. Across testimony, the same pattern was described: a surge of agents, entry into homes and workplaces, escalation during encounters, and lasting disruption for families and communities.

In Minneapolis, witnesses and public reporting describe the fatal shooting of U.S. citizen Renee Good during an enforcement operation carried out in public and captured on video. The incident has drawn worldwide attention and remains a central example raised by multiple speakers when describing the level of force used during these operations.

“What happened to Renee, what happened to Alex Pretti, what happened to Marimar Martinez and countless others is intolerable in a civilized society...”

— Ben Berkman,
civil rights attorney representing
the family of Renee Good

Above, anti-ICE protests January 12, 2026 in Minneapolis, MN. United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent shot and killed Renee Good in Minneapolis on January 7th, 2026. ©Kurt Moses / Alamy



In a separate incident described in testimony by Minnesota resident **Khathong Sinwongsa**, masked agents entered a home without a warrant during a neighborhood operation and removed her brother, a U.S. citizen with no criminal history, after pointing a gun at family members. He was taken from his home while partially clothed and later released after agents determined he was not the person they were looking for. The incident was widely reported and documented with images and video, and was cited by witnesses as an example of how ICE's enforcement actions frequently targeted individuals mistakenly, including U.S. citizens and legal residents.

“My husband was beaten and dragged out of the car while our children witnessed everything.”

— Francisco Segovia (COPAL) on behalf of a directly impacted family

Testimony also described incidents where the use of force occurred in front of children and families. In one case shared by **Francisco Segovia** of *Comunidades Organizando El Poder y La Acción Latina (COPAL)*, agents forcibly removed a father from a vehicle while his young children were inside, leaving them alone in freezing conditions. The children witnessed the encounter as their father was beaten and taken away, and the incident was cited as an example of how enforcement actions created immediate physical danger and trauma for families.

“Minnesotans including US citizens have been stopped, arrested, and in some cases detained for hours or days based on little more than the color of their skin, the clothes they wear, the job they work in, the people they’re hanging out with, the language they’re speaking, or the accent they’re speaking it in, or just for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

— Raha Wala, Vice President of the National Immigration Law Center

Above, Francisco Segovia (COPAL), at the press conference introducing the People's Hearing on Immigration Enforcement, held on March 20, 2026.



Witnesses described these incidents not as isolated events, but as part of broader enforcement activity across neighborhoods. Testimony pointed to a large-scale deployment of agents and a sustained presence in residential areas, along with reports of agents entering homes, workplaces, and community spaces. People were removed from their homes, doors were broken down, and enforcement extended into restaurants, businesses, and public areas where people live and work.

During encounters, situations escalated quickly, including the use of crowd control weapons and physical force. Testimony included accounts of individuals being pushed, struck with rubber bullets, and exposed to tear gas, as well as a raid in North Minneapolis where flashbangs were deployed into a crowd. Bystanders were often unsure how to respond, and families were left despondent about what was happening and why.

Community Response and Constitutional Observers

Constitutional observers, organized through community networks such as Unidos MN's Monarca program, trained tens of thousands of Minnesotans to document enforcement activity, understand their rights, and support neighbors during encounters with federal agents. These observers serve as a frontline community response, providing real-time documentation, helping individuals assert their rights, and creating a public record of enforcement actions.

Testimony from constitutional observers and community members described enforcement actions that raised serious concerns about targeting, lack of clear authority, and the absence of public accountability. Witnesses reported individuals being stopped without warrants, questioned without clear cause, and detained in ways that created panic and confusion about where they were being taken and under what authority.

Observers described a coordinated effort to document enforcement activity through trained constitutional observer programs, including monitoring operations, recording interactions, and helping community members understand their rights in real time. Testimony from Edwin Torres DeSantiago of the Immigration Defense Network, a statewide coalition of over 100 immigrant, labor, faith, legal organizations working

Above, Federal law enforcement agents fire pepper balls at protesters outside the Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building during a demonstration over the fatal shooting of Renee Good by a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent, on January 10, 2026 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. © Michael Nigro / Pacific Press



“Constitutional observers have a vital role in our communities... When enforcement agencies know they’re being observed, it increases transparency.”

— Edwin Torres DeSantiago,
Immigration Defense Network

together to defend the constitutional rights of immigrants across Minnesota, explained that observers were not only witnessing isolated incidents, but documenting consistent patterns across multiple encounters, including stops without warrants, excessive use of force, racial profiling, and a lack of transparency and oversight in these operations.

“Observation is not interference. It is a constitutional right that is protected by the first amendment.”

— Luis Argueta,
Communications
Director at Unidos MN

At the same time, observers reported retaliation and interference when attempting to carry out this work. They described being closely followed by agents, confronted with orders to cease filming in public spaces, and forcibly pushed away from areas where they had a legal right to be present. These actions not only limited transparency, but also raised concerns about efforts to prevent documentation of enforcement activity.

Testimony further highlighted incidents in which agents failed to identify themselves or provide warrants when questioned by community members. One of those community members is Sara Mendoza Reyes, who responded to an online live call for help. When she arrived at the location, a roofing job site, she saw unmarked and unidentified agents surrounding construction workers.

Despite repeated requests, agents did not provide identification or legal authority for the operation. Along with community members, including families with children present, Sara attempted to de-escalate what was happening as agents displayed weapons and used intimidation tactics to control the scene.

This incident is an example of how enforcement actions unfolded in public spaces without transparency, leaving both those targeted and those attempting to observe or assist without clear information about who was conducting the operation or under what authority.

Despite a large-scale, organized community effort to document and de-escalate enforcement, testimony shows that transparency was routinely blocked, with observers and community members prevented from seeing, recording, or understanding what government agents were doing in real time.

Due Process and Legal Infringements

Testimony described a system where people were unable to access or rely on basic legal protections at the moments when they mattered most.

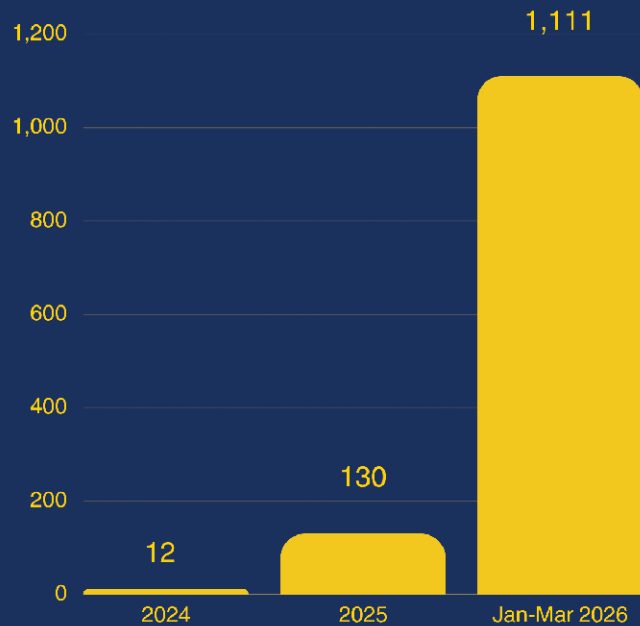
The U.S. District Court for the Minnesota District was overwhelmed with lawsuits claiming unlawful detention.

While the accounts presented in Minnesota reflect conditions on the ground in this state, witnesses emphasized that these violations are part of a broader pattern unfolding across the country, where due process protections are being eroded in similar ways. Witnesses pointed to problems at every stage, including agents entering homes without judicial warrants, individuals being detained without clear explanation of legal authority, and families and attorneys struggling to locate people after they were taken into custody.

These failures were not abstract; they had real and devastating consequences for individuals, families, and communities.

Aarti Kohli, *Executive Director of the Asian Law Caucus*, shared the story of Nurul Amin Shah Alam in Buffalo, New York, a Rohingya refugee who was legally present in the United States, nearly blind, and spoke limited English. After mistakenly approaching the wrong home, he was arrested without an interpreter and without any meaningful effort to understand his situation. He was later transferred through multiple agencies and ultimately left alone in freezing conditions miles from his home. His body was found days later. The breakdown in due process at every stage illustrates how quickly legal protections can collapse when they are not enforced.

Number of Lawsuits Filed in U.S. District Court in Minnesota by Non-Citizens Claiming Unlawful Detention



Source: Chief Judge Patrick Schiltz, Chief Judge, U.S. District Court, District of Minnesota, in interview with Paul Blume, Fox 9, KMSP, published April 27, 2026.

“Detention has been weaponized to coerce people into abandoning legitimate claims for representation and immigration status. We see case after case in court where people abandon strong asylum cases to gain temporary freedom.

— Madeline Lohman,
Advocates for Human Rights

These experiences highlight serious due process concerns, including the right to notice, the right to counsel, and the ability to challenge detention. Testimony made clear that, in many cases, these fundamental rights were not effectively accessible in practice.

Madeline Lohman, *Director of Advocacy for Advocates for Human Rights*, and attorney working with asylum seekers, explained that the right to seek asylum is firmly established under both U.S. and international law. Individuals who arrive in the United States have a legal right to present their case and cannot be returned to a country where they may face persecution.

Despite this, testimony described repeated instances where individuals who were actively engaged in legal processes were detained anyway. **Mayor Kaohly Her** reported that asylum seekers with valid documentation were taken during enforcement operations,

even when they presented paperwork showing they were following the legal process. She also described enforcement tactics that placed individuals in impossible situations. Community members were instructed to report for routine check-ins related to their cases, only to be detained when they arrived.

Testimony further described a pattern of coercion within detention itself. Individuals were pressured to sign documents they did not understand, including agreements to self-deport, even in cases where judges had ordered their release. In many cases, people were held without access to legal counsel or clear information about their rights, making it difficult to challenge their detention or make informed decisions.

“They had all of their proper documentation and we saw incident after incident where they were taken and sent to Texas...”

— Mayor Kaohly Her,
Mayor of Saint Paul

“Once they’re transferred, they can disappear in every practical sense.”

— Gloria Contreras Edin,
immigration attorney

In other cases, individuals were transferred across state lines shortly after being detained, including to facilities in Texas. Once transferred, families and attorneys often lost track of where individuals were being held.

Testimony also highlighted malicious practices that made it even harder to locate individuals after detention. Witnesses described cases in which people were taken to hospitals or medical facilities and intentionally recorded under different or altered names. In some instances, this meant that family members and attorneys searching official systems could not locate the individual at all. Such deceptive practices not only delayed legal intervention but also effectively prevented access to counsel and obstructed the ability to challenge detention in real time.

More than 70 children from Minnesota were detained, some separated from their parents (from federal data reported by the Sahan Journal).

Ben Berkman, a civil rights attorney representing the family of Renee Good, explained that there are very few ways to pursue civil accountability against federal agents, even when they violate constitutional rights. Unlike state or local officers, federal agents are largely shielded from the same types of lawsuits, creating significant barriers for victims seeking accountability.

What emerges from the testimony is a system where the law itself is no longer a safeguard. Individuals who followed legal pathways, presented valid documentation, and attempted to comply with requirements were still detained, transferred, or effectively disappeared. At the same time, the structures meant to provide accountability offer little recourse when those rights are violated. In practice, this leaves people navigating a system where legal protections exist on paper but cannot be reliably used to prevent harm or secure justice once harm occurs.



“We need three things. First, we need all federal immigration agents out of our community. They’re still here. Second, we need accountability for the inhumane and unjust ways our community members have been treated. And third, we need resources to help our community heal from the economic emergency and collective trauma that will impact us for decades to come.”

— Testimony of Charlotte Carlsen, High School Math Educator

Detention System and Conditions

Testimony described a detention system that extends far beyond confinement. Once individuals are taken into custody, they enter a process defined by movement, isolation, and limited access to basic resources. Rather than a single facility, witnesses described a connected system that moves people away from their communities and support networks, making it difficult to maintain contact with family members, access legal counsel, or understand what is happening to them.

Court filings and testimony regarding the Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building in Fort Snelling, Minnesota provide a detailed account of how this system begins at the local level. Individuals detained at Whipple reported limited access to legal counsel, barriers to communication, and conditions that made it difficult to understand or participate in their own legal cases. These conditions show how detention in Minnesota itself creates immediate obstacles to exercising basic rights.

“Several individuals I spoke with did not have attorneys and did not know how to contact one... it did not appear that detainees received clear, timely guidance about contacting counsel.”

— Declaration of Kimberly Boche,
Supporting Document: Boche Declaration,
Advocates for Human Rights v. DHS
(D. Minn. 0:26-cv-00749)

“I could not successfully call out when I attempted to use the phone... The number codes I called were all out of service and did not connect.”

— Declaration of Hanne Sandison,
Supporting Document: Sandison Declaration,
Advocates for Human Rights v. DHS
(D. Minn. 0:26-cv-00749)

During the court-ordered visit, attorneys encountered individuals who had been held significantly longer than what officials stated. At the same time, efforts to speak with detainees and assess conditions were cut short by officials, limiting outside oversight.

“All detainees I observed were shackled at the ankles... I saw men sleeping on the floor with no bedding.”

— Declaration of Hanne Sandison,
Supporting Document: Sandison Declaration,
Advocates for Human Rights v. DHS
(D. Minn. 0:26-cv-00749)

“Agents... told us we had to exit... because we were interfering with operations.”

— Declaration of Kimberly Boche,
Supporting Document: Boche Declaration,
Advocates for Human Rights v. DHS
(D. Minn. 0:26-cv-00749)

Testimony then described what happens next. Individuals are frequently transferred out of Minnesota, often with little or no notice to their families or attorneys. Many are sent to Texas, where there is a larger detention infrastructure and a more restrictive court system. Witnesses explained that these transfers are not incidental. Moving people across state lines increases distance from legal support, disrupts communication, and makes it significantly harder to challenge detention.

Daniel Hatoum of the *Texas Civil Rights Project* described how this system operates across state lines. Individuals detained in Minnesota are transported to facilities in Texas because of the availability of detention beds and the legal environment they will face once there. In practice, this movement isolates individuals from their attorneys and families while placing them in jurisdictions where it is more difficult to pursue legal relief.

“They were essentially arresting folks in Minnesota and immediately putting them on a bus to Texas.”

— Daniel Hatoum,
Texas Civil Rights Project

Once transferred, individuals enter facilities with well documented deplorable conditions. Testimony highlighted two facilities in particular. The South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas is one of the largest family detention facilities in the country. It has been widely criticized for inadequate medical care and conditions that negatively affect children and families. Camp East Montana at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas was described as having even more severe conditions. Testimony and reporting have documented lack of medical care, widespread illness, use of force, and deaths in custody, including a recent death ruled a homicide by a medical examiner. Supporting documentation further describes prolonged detention in harsh conditions, lack of adequate medical care, and systemic failures to meet basic health and safety standards.

These conditions illustrate what individuals face once they are moved through this system.

“Detained individuals at Fort Bliss face prolonged exposure, inadequate medical care, and delayed or denied responses to medical emergencies, placing their health and safety at serious risk.”

— Supporting Document:
Fort Bliss ICE Detention Letter
(Dec. 8, 2025)

Recent reporting further raises concerns about accountability and transparency in deaths at Fort Bliss. After a medical examiner ruled that prior death a homicide caused by “asphyxia due to neck and torso compression,” a subsequent death was sent to a military hospital for autopsy rather than the county medical examiner, limiting public access to findings. This shift raises concerns about the lack of independent investigation and whether oversight remains separate from the agencies responsible for detention. — Supporting Reporting: Texas Tribune, Feb. 3, 2026¹²

Taken together, testimony describes a continuous process rather than separate facilities. Individuals are detained in Minnesota, held in conditions that limit access to counsel, transferred across state lines, and placed in facilities where distance, conditions, and legal barriers further weaken their ability to assert their rights. At each stage, movement and isolation function to separate individuals from the resources and information needed to navigate their cases. What emerges is a system that produces and relies on distance, confusion, and restricted access at every step of the way.

Mental Health and Community Harm

Testimony described a level of fear that extended beyond individual encounters and into daily life, affecting how families, students, and entire communities function. Witnesses consistently described not only immediate trauma during enforcement actions, but ongoing psychological harm driven by uncertainty, isolation, and the threat of detention. Across testimony, the impact was not limited to those directly targeted, but spread across classrooms, neighborhoods, and local economies.

“Overnight they’re gone... families didn’t know who to trust... it really wasn’t about educating anymore, it was about letting them know that they’re valued and that we care for them.”

— Raymond A., educator

Raymond A., an educator working with a large immigrant student population in Minneapolis, described how fear reshaped the daily lives of students and families. Following enforcement activity in the community, hundreds of students stopped attending school, with many remaining at home out of fear. Teachers and school staff shifted their focus away from instruction and toward emotional support, safety, and basic needs.

Raymond explained that many students remain afraid to return to school, with families choosing isolation over the risk of their loved ones being forcibly separated. The impact has been ongoing, with students disconnected from education, peers, and support systems.

Students themselves expressed this fear and isolation directly. The following excerpts are drawn from letters written in Spanish by students in Minnesota. Quotes are translated into English, with original language preserved where noted. The letters, submitted without identifying information to protect students’ privacy, consistently reflect not only fear, distrust, and anger, but also a loss of trust in institutions that are meant to provide safety and stability.

“Siento enojo porque nos tratan como si no fuéramos humanos.”

“I feel anger because they treat us as if we are not human.”

“Tenemos miedo de salir porque no sabemos si se van a llevar a nuestros padres.”

“We are afraid to go outside because we don’t know if they will take our parents.”

“Solo quiero que entiendan que somos personas.”

“I just want them to understand that we are people.”

Kristen Stuenkel, School District Communications Director of Columbia Heights Public Schools, described how these impacts played out at the district level. In a school system serving a large immigrant population, enforcement activity led to sharp declines in attendance, widespread fear among students and staff, and the rapid creation of an online learning system to accommodate families who no longer felt safe leaving their homes.

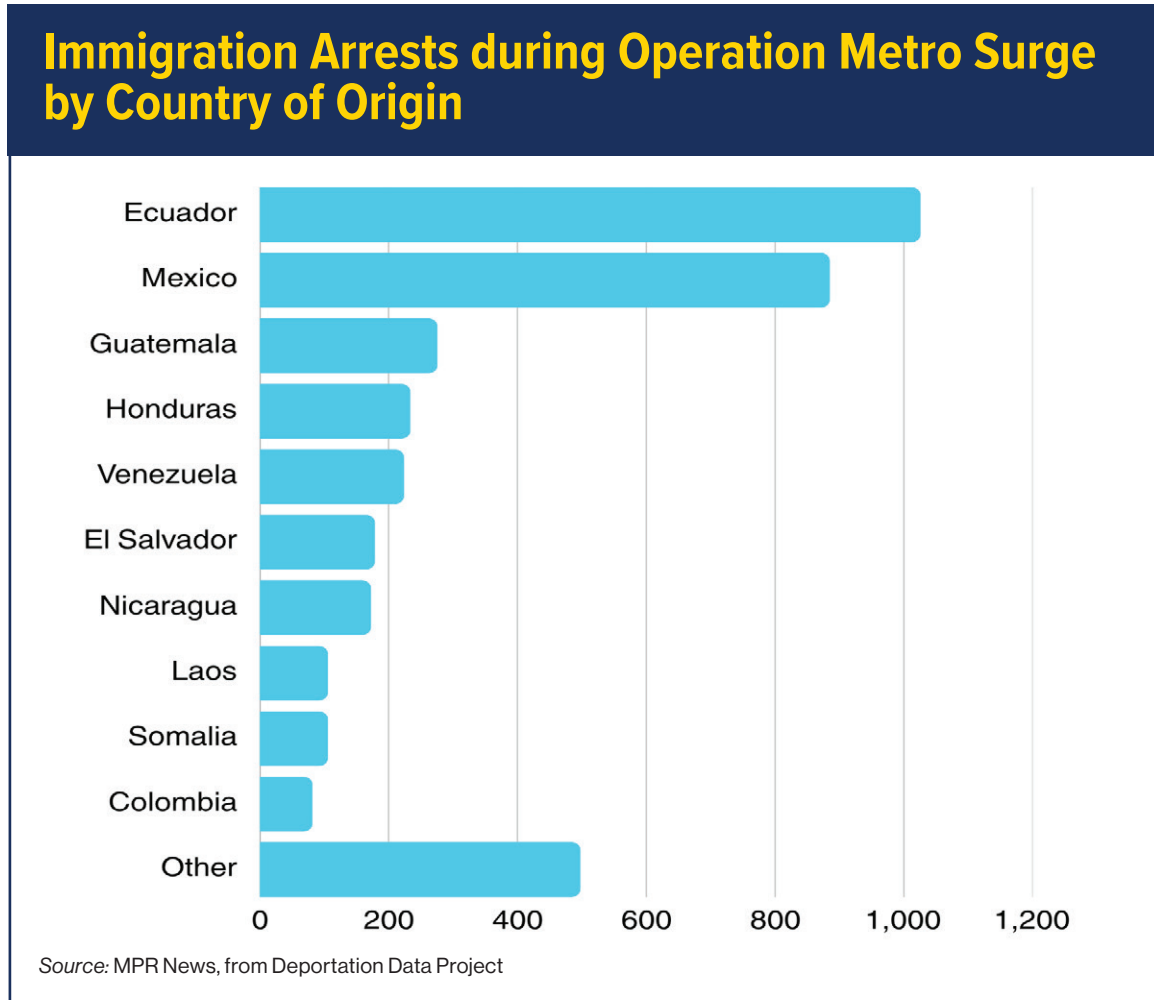
At one point, 900 students, nearly one third of the district’s students, shifted to online learning, while roughly 150 disappeared from the system entirely. Some families remained inside their homes for weeks, covering windows and avoiding all outside contact. Students who returned to school often experienced separation anxiety and struggled to re-engage with learning after prolonged periods of fear and instability.

“ICE was like a sinister fog hanging over our community... its intimidating presence causing fear, stress, and desperation.”

— Kristen Stuenkel,
Columbia Heights
Public Schools

Testimony from community members reinforced these patterns. **Nimco Ahmed** described how fear spread quickly through neighborhoods, affecting how people moved, worked, and interacted. **Mayor Amáda Márquez Simula** of Columbia Heights similarly described how enforcement activity disrupted daily life and created a constant sense of risk for families, even during routine activities.

The administration justified the surge partly by accusing the Somali community of widespread fraud and criminality, but the vast majority of detained individuals were Latino, often detained on the street, pulled from their homes without warrants, or arrested after picking up their children at school.



The impact extended beyond households and schools. Businesses were affected as workers stopped showing up, customers stayed home, and economic activity slowed. Testimony from **John Pacheco Jr.**, President of the Latino Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota, provided a clearer picture of the scale of this disruption. In a survey of Latino-owned businesses, 86% reported being directly impacted, 44% had temporarily closed, 28% had reduced services, and more than half reported losing over 50% of their revenue. He explained that fear is not only keeping customers away, but preventing workers from showing up at all, forcing business owners to adapt in ways that reflect the depth of the crisis.

“Right now, they’re afraid to come to work... my son runs a restaurant, and he literally picks people up, brings them to work, and brings them back home because they’re afraid to take the public bus.”

— John Pacheco Jr.,
President, Latino Chamber of
Commerce of Minnesota

“Just the other day I told my daughter I’m going to run over to the hardware store and she immediately said, “where’s your passport,” and I didn’t even think of it right away but she is worried about my health and what may happen to me when I walk out the door.”

— John Pacheco Jr., Latino Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota

Pacheco also described how this fear is reshaping daily life and identity within the community, including among his own family, where even routine activities now carry risk.

Testimony also described how communities responded to this harm. Schools, local organizations, and neighbors mobilized to provide food, transportation, and support for affected families. Educators, community members, and volunteers worked to maintain contact with students, deliver resources, and create informal safety networks.

While these efforts reflect the community spirit, resilience, and solidarity displayed by Minnesotans, witnesses emphasized that they are responses to harm, not substitutes for stability. Students remain out of school, families remain in fear, and the long-term mental health impacts of these experiences are still unfolding. Taken together, the testimony shows that enforcement practices are not only producing immediate harm, but are reshaping how communities’ function, weakening trust, and disrupting the systems that support everyday life.



THE PEOPLE'S KEY FINDINGS

1. Escalation of immigration enforcement actions is causing widespread disruption and harm.

During Operation Metro Surge, immigration enforcement activity increased in frequency, visibility, and intensity across Minnesota. Testimony describes enforcement raids taking place in public spaces, residential areas, and workplaces, creating fear and confusion within communities. Individuals reported being stopped or detained without clear justification, often without a warrant. The operation resulted in thousands of arrests and sustained activity across the Twin Cities, including fatal shootings of U.S. citizens, separated families, terrorized communities, individuals racially profiled regardless of immigration status, and families forced to change daily routines and avoid public spaces. While the level of enforcement has decreased, many of the negative impacts are ongoing.

2. Enforcement practices are being carried out without accountability or federal oversight.

Enforcement actions are being conducted without clear officer identification, explanation of authority, or consistent presentation of warrants, limiting the public's ability to understand or verify government activity. Individuals described interactions where officers did not identify themselves, did not explain the basis for stops or detentions, or entered private property, sometimes by force, without presenting a judicial warrant as required by the Fourth Amendment. In several cases, families were unable to obtain basic information about what happened to their relatives after an encounter. This reflects a pattern of enforcement without any accountability.

3. Due process protections enshrined in law and in the Constitution are being denied in practice.

Individuals are being detained and processed in ways that prevent them from understanding or asserting their rights. Accounts describe racial and ethnic profiling, lack of timely access to legal counsel, failure to provide information in a language individuals understand, and rapid processing without meaningful opportunity to respond. In some cases, individuals were detained despite being U.S. citizens or having legal status or pending cases. These cases represent a denial of basic due process protections that are supposed to apply regardless of immigration status.

4. Individuals are being effectively “disappeared” within the system following detention.

Individuals taken into custody often become difficult or impossible to locate in a timely way. Families, attorneys, and community organizations reported repeated instances where they could not determine where a person was being held, sometimes for days or longer, if at all. This lack of traceability effectively places individuals outside the reach of oversight, limiting access to legal support, contact with family, and verification of their well-being. This is a systemic failure that strips families and attorneys of any reliable way to locate people in custody and challenge unlawful detention in real time.

5. Detention conditions and practices have resulted in deaths and restricted individuals' ability to exercise their rights.

Conditions inside detention facilities limit access to communication, medical care, and legal support. Individuals described constant movement, isolation, and lack of clear information about their cases or timelines. In some instances, enforcement actions involved use of force and resulted in deaths, without evidence of a timely, independent, and transparent investigation afterward. These conditions restrict individuals' ability to secure counsel, communicate with family, and participate in their legal cases and put their well-being at high risk.



6. Enforcement practices are causing lasting mental health harm to families and communities.

The impacts of enforcement extend well beyond individual encounters. Testimony describes children experiencing fear, anxiety, and disruption to their education after witnessing or being affected by enforcement actions. Families reported changes in daily behavior, including avoiding schools, workplaces, and public services. Community organizations described increased demand for support, including legal assistance, mental health services, and emergency resources. The impact is widespread and ongoing, and it affects entire communities regardless of the individuals' immigration status.

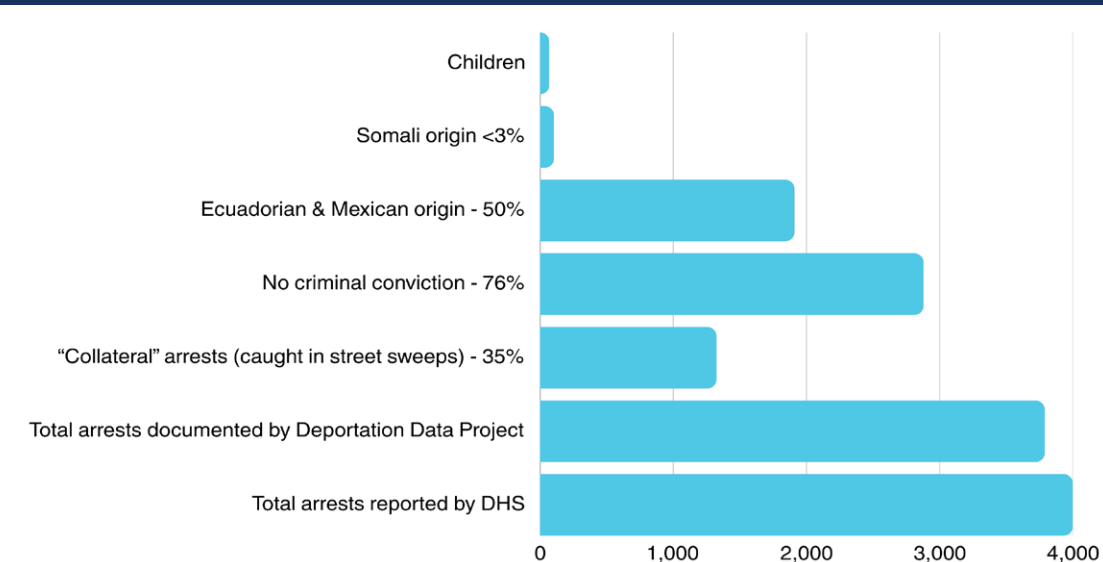
7. The First Amendment free speech rights of observers have been consistently violated, resulting in improper arrests, use of force, injury and deaths of U.S. citizens.

Trained constitutional observers attempting to document what is happening on the ground reported a pattern of retaliation and interference. They have been followed by agents, ordered to stop filming in public spaces, and shoved and pushed away from sidewalks and streets where they had every legal right to stand. They have been tear gassed and hit by rubber bullets and flashbang grenades. Dozens of observers have been injured. One was shot in the leg and two — both U.S. citizens — were killed. No meaningful investigations have occurred, and local investigators have been denied access to evidence.

8. Local economies and small businesses are being negatively affected.

Business owners and workers reported that increased enforcement activity is affecting local economies, particularly in industries that rely heavily on immigrant labor. Testimony described reduced customer traffic, workforce disruptions, and increased uncertainty among employees. Some businesses have struggled to maintain operations as workers avoid job sites or leave positions due to fear of enforcement. The economic impact extends beyond individual businesses, affecting broader local and regional economic stability.

Who Was Arrested During Operation Metro Surge? ESTIMATES FROM THE DEPORTATION DATA PROJECT



Source: *Deportation Data Project*

THE PEOPLE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Conduct a full and independent investigation into Operation Metro Surge.

Federal authorities should initiate a comprehensive investigation into the planning, execution, and oversight of Operation Metro Surge, including the actions of leadership within the White House, the Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and Customs and Border Protection, as well as individual officers involved in enforcement activities. This investigation should examine potential violations of constitutional rights, use of force, detention practices, and compliance with court orders.

Oversight bodies should initiate independent civil rights investigations into Operation Metro Surge, including the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and relevant congressional committees. Given the scale and impact of the operation, parallel investigations are necessary to ensure accountability at all levels and to determine whether systemic failures or direct disregard of the law contributed to the violations documented in this report.

2. Establish independent oversight and public reporting requirements for immigration enforcement operations.

Federal agencies should be required to publicly report key data related to enforcement operations, including arrests, transfers, use of force incidents, and deaths in custody. A use of force policy should be codified and enforced. DHS should be required to coordinate with states on large-scale operations, and independent monitoring mechanisms should be established to ensure transparency and allow for real time oversight of enforcement activities.

3. Protect the constitutional rights of both targeted individuals and observers during enforcement actions.

Federal agencies must require officers to clearly identify themselves by name and agency, present judicial warrants before attempting to enter private property such as homes or cars and respect the free speech rights of individuals and community members to observe and document enforcement activity in public spaces. Protections for constitutional observers and members of the public must be enforced to ensure accountability. This includes requiring use of body cameras and prohibiting use of masks. DHS should not be permitted to track constitutional observers engaged in activities protected by the First Amendment. State and local law enforcement should have the explicit right to investigate potential possible crimes committed by DHS, and receive full access to evidence in use of force incidents.

4. Strengthen and enforce due process protections and establish reliable tracking systems for detained individuals.

Profiling based on race or ethnicity, job, language or accent should be banned. Officers should be required to verify non-citizenship before an individual is detained. Federal agencies should ensure immediate access to legal counsel, interpreters, and clear information about rights for all individuals taken into custody. A real time tracking system should be implemented to allow families and attorneys to locate individuals and maintain contact throughout the detention process.



5. Reform detention practices and fully enforce standards.

Minimum standards for detention conditions, including decent living conditions and meals, access to medical care, communications, and legal resources, should be enforced, alongside regular independent inspections of detention facilities. States should have the right to sue DHS for violations, and Congress members should have unlimited access to ICE facilities.

6. Limit the use of interstate transfers.

Transfers of detainees across state lines should be limited to circumstances where they do not interfere with access to counsel or family.

7. Support community recovery and address the broader impacts of enforcement on families and local economies.

State and local governments, in coordination with federal partners, should provide resources to support affected communities, including mental health services for students and families, economic relief for small businesses, and protections for schools, hospitals, and workplaces. Arrests at hospitals and clinics, schools, daycare centers, and places of worship should once more be prohibited. These measures are necessary to address the long-term impacts of enforcement and help restore stability in affected communities.



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APPENDICES

Agenda

The People's Hearing on Immigration Enforcement: Minnesota

DATE: Tuesday, March 10, 2026

LOCATION: 797 East 7th Street St. Paul, MN 55106

LIVE-STREAMED: <https://hisped.info/MNforum>

The People's Hearing on Immigration Enforcement was a public forum rooted in the long civil rights tradition of community fact-finding and record-building. Designed to inform federal oversight and accountability efforts, the hearing gathered and preserved on-the-record testimony about how federal immigration enforcement affects constitutional protections, civil rights, and community safety.

ABOUT THE PANELS

PANEL 1: Enforcement Practices and Civil Rights Violations

This panel will examine immigration enforcement practices and their civil rights implications in Minneapolis and the broader Minnesota region. Testimony will highlight community experiences, enforcement patterns, racial profiling concerns, and the role of local institutions and advocacy organizations responding to enforcement activity.

PANEL 2: National Immigration Enforcement, Detention, and Civil Rights Impacts

This panel will provide national context on immigration enforcement and detention practices. Speakers will discuss patterns emerging across the country, civil rights implications of federal enforcement actions, and ongoing litigation and policy responses related to detention and deportation. Testimony will also address the transfer of detainees across state lines following ICE encounters, including the movement of individuals from Minnesota and other states to detention facilities in Texas and Montana.

PANEL 3: Impacted Individuals and Families

This panel will center the experiences of impacted individuals, families, and community leaders in Minnesota. Testimony will focus on the real-world impacts of immigration enforcement, the experiences of families navigating enforcement actions, and the ways community institutions are supporting immigrant communities.

PUBLIC INPUT: Community Testimony

Following the three panels, invited community members in attendance will have the opportunity to offer brief testimony during the public input period. This portion of the program is intended to expand the hearing record beyond invited panelists and ensure additional community experiences are documented.



From left to right: Liliana Letran-Garcia, President & CEO, CLUES, at the podium; Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison; and U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Chair Rochelle Garza.

HEARING TRANSCRIPT

Opening Statement

Liliana Letran-Garcia, *President & CEO, CLUES (Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio)* – Good afternoon everyone and welcome. My name is Liliana Letran-Garcia and I have the honor of serving as the CEO and president of Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES). Before we begin, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the organizations and leaders who helped make this important hearing possible. Thank you to the Hispanic Federation and Frankie, Luis Miranda and the entire Miranda Family for their leadership and commitment to uplifting Latino communities across the country. Thank you as well to the Latino Victory and Katharine Pichardo for their partnership and dedication to civic engagement and representation. And we are honored to be joined by the Honorable Rochelle Garza, Chair of the US Commission on Civil Rights, whose presence underscores the importance of ensuring that civil rights protections are upheld in all communities. On behalf of CLUES, thank you for being here today. Thank you to the community members, leaders, advocates, and families who join us in person and to those watching via livestream. Your presence today matters. It sends a powerful message. Our communities are not invisible and our voices matter.



CLUES was founded in 1981 with a clear mission to stand with Latino families in Minnesota and help build pathways to opportunity, stability, prosperity, and well-being. Today, more than four decades later, Latinx Minnesotans are a vital part of our state. We are union and agricultural workers. We are business owners, nurses, doctors, parents, teachers, students, community, and faith leaders who contribute every day to the economic, cultural, and civic life of Minnesota. For more than 40 years, CLUES has walked alongside families through moments of opportunity, through moments of uncertainty, and moments when dignity and justice must be defended.

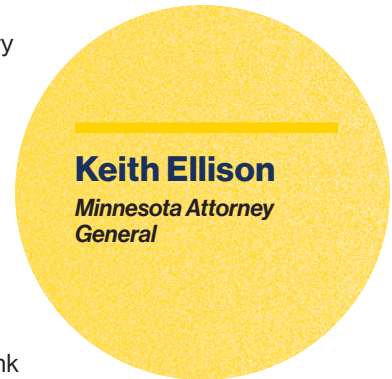
Today is one of those moments. Across Minnesota and especially here in the Twin Cities, my home, immigrant families are experiencing increased fear, confusion, and disruption in their daily lives as immigration enforcement practices intensified. Parents are worried about going to work. Children are worried about going to school. Families are worrying about whether they will see each other again tomorrow. At CLUES, we see the human impact of these realities every single day. Families walk through

our doors not only seeking services. They come seeking clarity, reassurance, and hope. They come looking for trusted guidance in moments when the world around them suddenly feels uncertain. And that is why today the Hispanic Federation’s People’s Hearing matters. This hearing is about documenting truth. It is about lifting lived experience. And it is about ensuring that the voices of our community are heard clearly by those who hold the power to shape policy and protect rights. Behind every policy decision, there are real human lives. Today we will hear from community members whose stories reflect both the challenges families are facing and the extraordinary courage they show every day. To those who will share their testimony, thank you. Your voices are powerful, your experiences matter, and your courage will help us illuminate that path forward for all of us. We are so grateful to the many leaders, advocates, and organizations who continue to stand alongside immigrant communities in pursuit of dignity, fairness, and accountability. And before we begin the hearing, it is my true honor to introduce a leader who understands that the law is not simply a system of rules. It is a promise. a promise that every person deserves protection, dignity, and a fair chance to build a future. At its best, the law is meant to serve the people, to stand with families, and to protect communities, and to ensure that justice is not reserved for the powerful, but accessible to everyone. Minnesota’s Attorney’s General has made that principle central to his work. He often describes his role as serving as the people’s lawyer, standing up for Minnesotans so they can afford their lives, protect their families, and live with safety, dignity, and respect. Please join me in welcoming Minnesota’s Attorney General, Keith Ellison.

“Behind every policy decision, there are real human lives.”

–Liliana Letran-Garcia,
President & CEO, CLUES (Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio)

Keith Ellison, Minnesota Attorney General – Thank you so much for that very kind introduction and thank you so much for pulling us together today for this very critical hearing. It is indeed an honor for all of us to be in the presence of Luis Miranda who not only is a pretty good dad but is an amazing leader in his own right in New York and across the country. I don’t know if it’s legal to applaud at a hearing like this but Luis Miranda everybody and thank you for your team and thank you for everyone. And also let me say I’m very grateful and appreciate very much all of the people who will present today including our municipal leaders who are here. We’re in the city of St. Paul with Mayor Kaohly Her who we’re so proud of. Thank you. And let me say thank you to all of our municipal leaders who have come here today to share. And of course, thank you to CLUES for its many decades of tremendous service to our community, to its invaluable contributions year after year, we’re so much in your debt. But mostly, thank you



to the members of the community. If you have given someone a ride to their job that they were terrified to do on their own, if you’ve looked after their children, if you provided groceries to their home, if you’ve shopped in the store at Mercado Central or any business where our Latino business community is making such a tremendous and vitally important contribution to our economy, if you have stepped forward and helped, even if you’ve made prayers, which are no small thing in my opinion. Thank you for all that you’ve done.

Clearly Minnesota has been through a traumatic experience and clearly Minnesotans have stepped up to help each other in many ways led by our Latino community but also with our Somali community, Hmong community, black, white, all colors, all cultures, all faiths with the leadership of our Latino community. We’re so grateful for that. So this gathering to hear testimony is really a long long long part of our civil rights tradition. When communities’ rights are being violated, listening to learning from recording these

experiences make us reflect on what we've been through and be stronger for the next time. And of course, the next time is still, you know, this is still going on. We have an ongoing issue. So as Attorney General in the state of Minnesota, my responsibility is to protect people, the people of Minnesota, and defend the rule of law. What is the rule of law? This is a good question. What's the rule of law? Philosopher John Locke one time in 1689 in a treatise on civil government said: where law ends, tyranny begins. Exactly a century later the United States Constitution was ratified cementing the rule of law as a means of escaping tyrannical rule. It also makes sense to ask yourself what is tyranny? Tyranny is when one person on a whim gets to decide for everyone. And they may use violence and maybe they don't, but the people's voices are not heard under tyrannical government. Right now, the rule of law is under attack. Right now, the rule of law is under assault, and we will not stand by and allow tyranny to replace it. No one, no matter who the president may be or

who's occupying the government, is above the law. No one is beneath it. Certainly, communities we represent are not beneath the law's protection. And no one in our country, no matter where you are born, is beneath the protection of the law. And that is why these stories are so critically important.

“This hearing is about documenting truth. It is about lifting lived experience. And it is about ensuring that the voices of our community are heard clearly by those who hold power to shape policy and protect rights.”

—Keith Ellison,
Minnesota Attorney General

Let me talk about Operation Metro Surge. Operation Metro Surge is the name that the federal government, Department of Homeland Security has given to what they've been doing in Minnesota. It is the single largest deployment of federal immigration agents in our history. Period. Never before have we seen nearly 4,000 armed masked mostly men descend upon our state bringing chaos, violence and death. Minnesotans know well the impact of this surge and they deserve to be known across the United States. Among them, Minnesotans

have endured widespread racial profiling. How many people stopped, pulled out of their car, and had papers demanded because they looked Hispanic? Which is interesting because anybody I mean, Hispanics come in all colors, right? Federal agents have violated the constitutional rights of legal observers and protesters and intentionally intimidated an untold number of Minnesotans for exercising their rights. Businesses have been closed and jobs have been lost. Tens of thousands of children have been forced to miss school. Children have fallen behind in school because of this. And people have fallen behind on their rent because they could not get safely to work. Children like Liam Conejo Ramos showed the world how cruel some adults can be. This young man who I'm so proud of. I just want to hug that kid. Five years old. He will never forget what happened to him and his dad. And I pray for him, and I urge you to do the same. ICE agents shot Julio Sosa-Celis in the leg, then lied about why. During that event, they unleashed tear gas on observers, causing a six-month-old child who lives nearby to stop breathing. It happened in my neighborhood. I found myself choking on the chemical irritant that they unleashed that day. Victor Manuel Diaz was transported from Minneapolis - from Minnesota to Camp East Montana eight days later. He died in custody. ICE has still not explained how. The Department of Homeland Security agents shot and killed US citizen Renee Good and Alex Pretti on the streets of Minneapolis. Alex Pretti was disarmed on camera and shot not one time, not two, not three, four or five, not six - friends, not seven or eight. He was shot 10 times. And I hate to bring you back to that terrible moment, but we cannot turn our eyes away from it. Federal law enforcement is still refusing to partner with state law enforcement like Hennepin County and the Attorney General's Office and the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension to investigate these deaths.

The administration offered all kinds of reasons for the surge, but every single one falls apart under the lightest scrutiny. It wasn't about immigration. Minnesota's noncitizen immigrant population is just 1.5% of the state's total population, well below the national average. So, most states have more than us. It wasn't about fraud. ICE agents aren't forensic accountants. They're not trained to fight fraud. In fact, the surge has made the fight against fraud in Minnesota much more difficult as the US attorney's office in Minnesota has been decimated by resignations due to the surge and the remaining assistant and US Attorneys who are there are drowning under a flood of habeas corpus petitions, as is proper, they should because people have a

right to due process. It wasn't about public safety because ICE has made our state less safe. At the time that Alex Pretti was killed, the city of Minneapolis had only experienced one homicide. So they were responsible for two out of the three and the vast majority of people ICE has arrested in Minnesota have no criminal record at all. What the surge is about is what President Trump said it was about. Who can forget his true social tweet where he said, "The day of reckoning and retribution is coming."? It's about vindictive politics. Trump sees Minnesotans as his enemy. Not that we've ever done anything to him, but sometimes just being who you are offends some people. Being just, being fair, living in your own skin upsets some people. Minnesota has voted against Donald Trump every time he's been on the ballot and so he sought retribution as he said himself. He's tried to cut our funding and shut down our programs many Minnesotans rely on and I've sued him every time and I will continue to do so. He's tried to pressure us into turning our backs on immigrants, on the trans community and on the values of inclusion itself. He's attacked our communities with vile racist language referring to the Somali community as garbage, and then he sent DHS to sow terror in our streets. This kind of targeted use of force to coerce cities and states to adopting administration's preferred policies is the opposite of the rule of law. It is a marker of tyranny.

"No one in our country, no matter where you are born, is beneath the protection of the law. And that is why these stories are so critically important."

—Keith Ellison,
Minnesota Attorney General

But in the face of that tyranny Minnesotans showed real courage. Minnesotans have set up mutual aid networks to get food and supplies to families that are struggling because they're afraid to go to work. Communities are organizing transportation to make sure kids can get to school without ICE harassing their parents or them. People organize themselves to legally observe DHS agents. It is thanks to them that we have documented so many cases of these federal conduct and behaviors. and more than 100,000 came out to peaceful protests on back-to-back Fridays in the bitter winter cold. The importance of this testimony cannot be diminished. Many of the people we'll hear from today will be sharing some difficult experiences. That's courage, too. Hearing and learning from these experiences can help us understand what happened and guide our future actions to make sure it doesn't happen again in Minnesota or elsewhere. Hearings like this help bring those experiences together in one place so that they can be documented and understood. As your Attorney General, I know just how many groundbreaking investigations can begin with people speaking up about what they've experienced. We know Minnesota needs a thorough investigation into what our neighbors have had to suffer through. Your testimony is an important step toward our ability to heal and our ability to seek accountability, justice, and better protection for our civil rights.

"Your testimony is an important step toward our ability to heal and our ability to seek accountability, justice, and better protection for our civil rights."

—Keith Ellison,
Minnesota Attorney General

In addition to testimony delivered here today, my office has set up a federal action reporting form on our website reporting incidents or effects related to or caused by the recent actions in Minnesota, including related to the surge. I encourage you to use it. You can find it at <https://www.ag.state.mn.us/federal-action> or just by searching federal action on the AG's website.

So, before we begin again, I'd like to thank everyone who's come here today and I'd like to recognize Rochelle Garza, Chair of the US Commission on Civil Rights, who will be presiding over this hearing. The US Commission on Civil Rights has a long history of documenting civil rights violations and helping the country confront difficult truths. And this hearing today is in good hands, both hers and yours. Gracias.



U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Chair Rochelle Garza.

PANEL 1

Enforcement Practices and Civil Rights Violations

Rochelle Garza, *Chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights* – Thank you so much to Attorney General Ellison for your remarks here and for being here today, for grounding us and for welcoming us to your state. Thank you to CLUES for and specifically Liliana Letran-Garcia for giving us a home to gather everyone today for the People’s Hearing on Immigration Enforcement and Civil Rights. And a heartfelt thank you to Frankie Miranda and the Hispanic Federation, Katharine Pichardo with Latino Victory and Luis Miranda and his family for bringing this all together. Everything they do, they do with so much heart and it’s about centering the community. And that’s what today is about — centering you all, your experiences, your voices. I’m Rochelle Garza, the Chair of the Commission on Civil Rights. I also serve as president of the Texas Civil Rights Project. And I’m also a mother. So I have a three-year-old that is turning four this month. I also have a one-and-a-half-year-old, no, 20 months at this point. So she’s going to be two in June. So I’m a mother. I’m a Texan. I’m a Fronteriza. So I grew up on the U.S.-Mexico border. I still live there today. And I imagine there are going to be a lot of connection points between what I grew up seeing, what I see every single day at home to what has happened here in Minnesota.

Rochelle Garza
*Chair of the U.S.
Commission on Civil
Rights*

I deeply appreciate the invitation to moderate this really important conversation. In my role working on civil rights issues, I’ve had the opportunity to hear testimonies from communities across the country about how policies and enforcement practices impact people’s lives. Gatherings like this are important because they allow communities to speak directly about their experiences, ensuring that not only are their voices heard, but it’s documented. Today’s hearing is about — we’re going to be focusing on immigration enforcement and the potential civil rights implications communities are experiencing here in Minnesota. We will hear from experts, advocates, and individuals directly impacted by enforcement actions. And the goal of today’s program is to create space for that testimony, for dialogue, and for documentation, as I’ve said, of community experiences. So, before we begin with our panels and with our programming, just a few quick notes. The event is being livestreamed and it is being recorded. Members of the media are present and

panelists, you're going to have about 5 to 7 minutes each for your remarks, so we can hear from everybody that has been scheduled for today.

And so with that, we're going to go ahead and transition to our first discussion which is on enforcement practices and civil rights violations. We're going to be examining immigration enforcement practices and the civil rights implications here in Minnesota and the broader Minnesota region. We're going to hear testimony about how immigration enforcement practices have evolved over the last year and the ways in which communities are experiencing and responding to those changes on the ground. Panelists are going to help us understand what enforcement practices are currently being observed, the types of civil rights violations being reported, concerns regarding racial profiling and enforcement patterns, and how local institutions, advocates, and community members are responding to this enforcement activity. So through this discussion we hope to gain a clearer understanding of the experiences that you all are having, the civil rights concerns and the administration's enforcement practices. So again, five to seven minutes each. We're going to go ahead and start with Mayor Kaohly Her. We also have Mayor Amada Marquez Simula, Kristen Stuenkel and Madeline Lohman. We'll go ahead and begin with Mayor Her.

Mayor Her, *Mayor, Saint Paul, MN* – Thank you so much. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Kaohly Her and I'm the mayor of our great capital city of St. Paul here. I am the first woman, the first refugee, and the first Asian-American to hold this office here in St. Paul. I want to thank the US Commission on Civil Rights Chair Garza, our National Advocacy Partners, the Hispanic Federation, Latino Victory, the Miranda family, and the many local advocates, organizers, and community members who are here today to bear witness to the testimonies that we're providing today. When Operation Metro Surge began with mass arrests even before the horrific killing and harmful arrest of Minnesotans, we saw clearly who was impacted first and most severely — our immigrant and refugee communities. These communities often carry the deepest vulnerabilities, and they felt the effects immediately. What was happening in our city here and across our state was deeply personal to me. I came to this country as a refugee when I was three years old



“We saw people being forcibly removed from their homes, doors getting broken down, (ICE) not having judicial warrants before entering private properties, going into restaurants and businesses...and taking employees out of their workplaces.”

– Mayor Her, Mayor, Saint Paul, MN

and I saw firsthand the impact of long decades of systemic and structural racism that led to some of the convictions that our community members had which led them into having to go into check-ins at the Whipple building and then also being detained and taken forcibly many times from their own homes. It was something that I witnessed personally within my own community but also in our diverse communities across the city. In addition to the personal responses and what I was seeing happening in my community there was also a need for an institutional response because as the Mayor of St. Paul I felt the deep obligation to make sure that we were protecting all of our communities here.

You know some of the work that we saw on the streets were people being forcibly removed from their homes, doors getting broken down, not having judicial warrants present before entering private properties, going into restaurants and businesses — private businesses and taking employees out

of their workplaces, intimidation tactics of driving around facilities. I was with the owner of the Mercado Mex — Henry the night that he actually had ICE come to his facility. I was actually at Indigenous Roots next door and we were told that ICE was in the neighborhood and just the constant intimidation and targeting people by the way that they looked or the way that they sound that we saw and heard these stories over and over and over again.



Mayor Kaohly Her, Mayor of Saint Paul, MN, providing testimony.

You know so our response to what we saw happening was that in St. Paul we had a three-prong approach. We had a legal and a legislative approach. The city of St. Paul, myself, I joined Mayor Fry and Attorney General Ellison in filing a lawsuit against the Department of Homeland Security and related agencies and officials to end ICE surge in Minnesota and to declare it unconstitutional and unlawful. I also joined the two of them at a congressional field hearing in St. Paul to inform Congress of the effects on St. Paul, including ICE agents asking where the Asian people live and that you have to start carrying your own passport. We also had a very recent hearing in front of the Senate Jobs and Economic Development Committee because there was a huge toll. This crisis created a huge economic impact on our communities. We had businesses shut down and of those that survived, their business was down 60 to 70% so that they were unable to bring back employees that were working with them. That has ripple effects in people's ability to pay for their rent and housing, to be able to pay for transportation or child care. So there we are in the process now of trying to quantify the cost of that so that we can provide a true economic cost of what this surge had on all of us. We also had a public safety approach because it was very clear that we were not ready for something of this magnitude, something that was so unprecedented. And what does it mean for our local law enforcement to engage when communities are threatened and their rights are being violated? but also what does it mean to make sure that we center our community members who are on the streets fighting, our constitutional observers. We worked very closely with the Immigrant Defense Network to figure out what should happen if we were to encounter another incident like we did on Rose Avenue where ICE agents were trying to remove somebody from a home and we had a large gathering of constitutional observers and protesters outside that we want to make sure that people are protected and safe. And so we worked with the Immigrant Defense Network to say how do we put a protocol into place so that should this happen again that we let the community lead some of these efforts versus having law enforcement be the one directing people. And then our third prong approach to this was that the after-response approach that it was really important for us to assess the damage that was done. So, we convened a meeting of Latino businesses and brought them all together to share what was happening within them. We had a gathering of about 30 members who came to have this meeting with us to talk about the impact to share with us the financial hardship that this created for them and then to also figure out where we could provide resources and then we started working with private companies and also some of our nonprofit institutions to see if we could have some emergency response funds to address the — well I'd say like stop the bleeding but, also then how do we create a long-term plan to assist our community members, our businesses, and those who were the most deeply impacted by this.

“This crisis created a huge economic impact on our communities. We had businesses shut down and of those that survived, their business was down 60 to 70% so that they were unable to bring back employees that were working with them.”

– Mayor Her, Mayor, Saint Paul, MN

And so that's just a few of the things that we did on the ground and our response and what we saw. You know, today our Twin Cities, once again, we were at the center of national attention, but I'm proud that our neighbors, organizers, and local leaders have stepped up working with you every day to support our immigrant refugee families during an incredibly challenging moment. What we see reported in the media is only a part of the story. I was in California for the funeral of one of our refugee members who actually had been detained by ICE. His mother passed away. And I went to that funeral and people in California asked me what is one thing that they should know about what was happening here in Minnesota. And I told them that the one thing you should know is far worse here than what you're seeing on the news. What we are experiencing and what is happening to people is far worse than the news could ever capture. The amount of untruthfulness, the lies that were being told about why people were being detained or how people were being detained or who was being detained that the lies are so enormous that it was hard for us to combat it with truth. So, I think that it's really important for us to remember that.

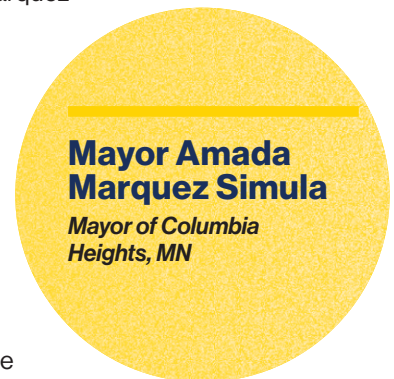
So now we face the difficult but necessary work of helping our communities heal. That means investing resources where they are needed most, listening to those directly affected, and finding creative ways to ensure our immigrant neighbors can remain safe and supported. And as mayor, I will continue working with local leaders, national advocacy organizations, and immigrant communities themselves to demand accountability and reconciliation from the federal government for the harm that has been inflicted on our cities and our families. Our immigrant and refugee neighbors are not statistics and policy debates. They are part of the fabric of our communities and protecting their dignity, safety, and right is not optional. It is our responsibility and I will be committed and continue to be committed to doing so.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you, Mayor. Mayor Marquez

Mayor Amada Marquez Simula, *Mayor of Columbia Heights, MN* – Thank you.

Thanks so much for the invitation to be here and be here among like my esteemed colleagues, and for you to take the time to come to Minnesota and hear from us. And thanks to CLUES and the Miranda family, everyone for supporting this work. In Columbia Heights, which is a small city just north of Minneapolis of three square miles, just about 22,000 people. We are one of the most ethnically and racially diverse cities in the state. We're actually more diverse than Minneapolis. Our students speak many languages. Families bring traditions, food, music, and perspectives from all over the world. I call Columbia Heights "Sesame Street" because everyone can be who they are, they don't have to assimilate, and everyone fits in where they are. Diversity is one of our greatest strengths. As you know, every child in our community deserves to feel they belong here. Their future matters. And for that, families need to feel safe sending their kids to school and participating fully in life in our city. Because at the center of this are children sitting in classrooms wondering if their families are still going to be together at the end of the day. We want to make sure they have stability and dignity — and a chance to grow and learn. And as adults, especially leaders, leaders in this room, we have to be honest with ourselves. We do not have the right to ask Liam or any of our children for forgiveness. Liam has been thrust into a world he never asked for. His whole family, all of our children at our schools, something that they will have to work through their entire lives. and we do not even have the right to say, "Please forgive us for this terrible situation that you've been put into." We have a responsibility to do better. We have a responsibility to work together, make our government, our policies, our communities more just, more humane, and more worthy.

I'd like to say that in Columbia Heights, our police department is one of most diverse police departments in Anoka County. We're not St. Paul. We're not Minneapolis. We are a small 29 person department of police officers. And we have even had our police officers be afraid at work because they have also been targeted across the region and they can't do that work when they're being targeted as well. Our community members have stood up to serve as Attorney General Ellison mentioned through our mutual aid in our community. We have already built a small strong community but coming together to deliver food, rides, groceries and yes, even as he said prayers just continue because the work isn't over. Now it is like the harder work in





Mayor Amada Marquez Simula, Mayor of Columbia Heights, MN, providing testimony.

a way of building everyone back and making sure we stay, you know, connected. Our local GoFundMe that people just set up, we have brought in over a half a million dollars. One was a school board member who isn't on the school board any longer. She has received \$425,000 that has been going out through volunteer services just to get food on people's tables and reimburse people as they go grocery shopping. I would say as Mayor Her mentioned, the news has not portrayed how this has been... the amount of terror, the amount of time people have stood outside of businesses just to let people in and businesses are locking their doors and then unlocking them when people come in and people just volunteer and say, "I'll stand at the front door to let safe people in," we have all experienced that." And going into a business that way is nothing we wanted to see. We have had some businesses reopen, but they don't have the staff they had. Our communities are supporting

them, but how much can you go out to eat? You know, when you have when you're spending money trying to take care of your community and reimburse gas cards for people who are volunteering, giving rides, safe rides. Our chat groups are still so busy with people asking for safe rides, mechanics volunteering to take care of people's cars because they haven't been running for two to three months.

In Columbia Heights, we actually have been dealing with this since the beginning of 2025. Immediately after the presidential inauguration, I had a meeting and asked school district members and I should say school board members and neighbors to attend to say, how are we going to do this? We are very worried about Project 2025. We know people are going to be targeted and we were in our community. We felt it all last year, but we kept our heads down because we didn't want to draw attention. And so I think another part of the news not showing how it's been is that our local police has been told that this is how the federal government comes in when they do enforcement because they're used to having people do it in a thoughtful constitutional way. Our local police had no idea what was going to be coming in and that's across all of our communities of small police departments, communities where they share police departments and the sheriff's office as well. And so we were all operating for the whole of last year with a different set of rules for things that are going to work out to the community every week, every month saying this is not right. This is not right. And people observing and I will remind everyone that the only reason we have Liam's photo or any photos of people being taken is because we had observers. If we did not have people willing to leave their house in the freezing cold weather that we had thankfully in January, we wouldn't even know those people were gone. And in Columbia Heights, we had people that were taken and we don't know. And we still don't know across our state who's been taken because there is no one submitting a report of who's been taken, or what their age is.

“Now we face the difficult but necessary work of helping our communities heal. That means investing resources where they are needed most, listening to those directly affected, and finding creative ways to ensure our immigrant neighbors can remain safe and supported.”

– Mayor Amada Marquez Simula,
Columbia Heights, MN

And the other factor I'd like to share is what is going to happen to all of their properties, their businesses? We know this has happened in the country in the United States before where people during World War II were taken and put in Japanese internment camps — people who were US citizens taken and all of their property was lost, and it went to someone. And I am very worried about those things happening here. What is going to happen to these people's businesses, their properties and how do we build back our state from this? I also am a part of a mayor's group that we put together called Mayors for Safe and Stable Cities and we are working towards similar ends of how we can get any funding or we have any resources to help us build back from this.

And then I'll just end with a little bit about who I am. My name is Amáda Márquez Simula. I'm the daughter of a Mexican who's from Nueva Laredo... near you, I guess. And my mother is from Wisconsin. And, as a Latina, as someone who knows the way you look is a way people are going to judge you and not treat you well sometimes. You know, it's been deeply personal, but I say that as in Minnesota, this is deeply personal. I have many friends who also know that maybe they can walk in a room and not be discriminated against, but that's not the world they want either. So, we all came together to really be here for Minnesota. So, thank you so much for being here and for listening.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you for sharing. Thank you. Kristen

Kristen Stuenkel, *School District Communications Director, Columbia Heights Public Schools* – Thank you very much for having me here to be able to share the story of our school district. I'm Kristen Stuenkel, Director of Community Education and Communications for Columbia Heights Public Schools. I'm responsible for our district's early childhood education programs and our family center, our childcare, our adult programs, including our Adult Basic Ed center, which provides classes for adults working on their GED or learning English or other employment skills. I'm also responsible for communication for our school district, which over these past two months has involved sharing our stories with local, national, and international media outlets.

Kristen Stuenkel

*School District
Communications
Director, Columbia
Heights Public Schools*

Minnesota is a special state for many reasons. Two of which are that we're the only state with a statewide community education system in every school district and the only state with early childhood family education in every school district. These two programs along with our public pre-K to grade 2 school system provides a critical nexus for communities not just educationally but also as a trusted source for accessing many community resources. This has never been more true than during this time of Operation Metro Surge in our community. Columbia Heights Public Schools serves Columbia Heights, Hilltop, and Southern Fridley. We have always been an immigrant community. And in our school district, over 50% of our students receive services from our English language learning program. And we see being multilingual as a superpower. Our entire district, which is about three and a half square miles, experienced the heavy and oppressive presence of immigration agents over the past two months. While the presence and threat has eased up to varying degrees over the past two weeks, it is important to still have the record of what has happened and its ripple effects, which will be long lasting.

ICE was like a sinister fog hanging over our community, its intimidating presence causing fear, stress, and desperation. Our students, families, and staff were stopped by ICE agents on their way to or from school. Seven students were detained by agents, and six students were sent to the detention facility in Dilley, Texas with their parents. Dozens of parents of our students have been detained. For example, at Valley View Elementary, 30 parents were detained, not to mention numerous other family members. One of our students, Liam Conejo Ramos, was taken on January 20th with his father after they returned home from his pre-K school day at Valley View Elementary. I want to thank Liam's mother who, when that happened said to our superintendent, "Please tell the story of what happened. Please use Liam's name and his photo and tell this to anyone who will listen." Prior to that, we had not been speaking because our families asked us not to, thinking that staying under the radar would keep them safe. On the day that Liam was taken, we had a high school student, a boy taken in the morning. So, we had two students taken on that day. I'm sure you all know the story of Liam that was widely reported and we were glad when he was returned to Minnesota on February 1st. Those two weeks in the Dilley facility were a horrible experience for them. Our Highland student, Elizabeth, was taken with her mother on their way to

“Some families have spent weeks inside their home with their windows covered with blankets, not daring to leave to go to work or school.”

– Kristen Stuenkel,
Columbia Heights Public Schools

school on January 6th and wasn't released until February 5th. Zuriel, a fifth-grade student girl from Valley View, was just released from Dilley on Friday with her mother and stepfather after two months. These were two months of no education and poor living conditions. Unexpectedly, she just came to school today. We're very glad that she's back, but we have a school system right now that has students that have been going to school, students that have been in detention for varying lengths of time, that have been at home, and many of the students are struggling with separation anxiety because they've been with their parents 24/7, getting used to the routines and rituals of school and the educational expectations. It's a very dynamic situation, as you can imagine, for schools right now.

We're not the only school to experience this. Some families have spent weeks inside their home with their windows covered with blankets, not daring to leave to go to work or school. In January, we saw significant drops in school attendance and fear on the part of some staff to travel to or from work. Our district responded by creating in very short order an online school, which we called Virtual Heights 2026, which opened on January 27th and will sunset on March 27th at the end of the quarter. At one point we had 900 of our 3,400 students enrolled in online learning. As the number of agents has decreased and the ominous fog is lifting, we have seen most of our elementary students return to in-person learning. The secondary students will return at the end of the quarter following spring break. It will be a joyous day when we are all back together. However, we won't be all back together as we have lost around 150 students who have left our district over this period. Each school, including our early childhood and adult basic ed programs, have responded to family needs for food, rent assistance, medical care, and legal resources. The support both in financial and hands to work of the immediate and extended communities has been uplifting and so very necessary. More bags, boxes, and crates of food than you can imagine have been delivered to individuals, groups, and delivered by individuals, groups, and organizations to our schools — neighbors and people of goodwill sorting and distributing and delivering food to houses, often many on the same street. I myself picked up boxes from CLUES in Minneapolis and delivered them to families. What a joy and heartbreak to see the faces through the windows, both parties waving and making heart shapes with their hands. School staff have helped families fill out DOPA, the Delegation Of Parental Authority forms. The school district staff have worked so closely with community members who have been outside of our buildings at each arrival and dismissal monitoring for safe passage of our students and staff. I saw it this morning even on my way into work.

Before I say my closing message, I want to say many of our parents who have come back now have ankle monitors on. Why do they have ankle monitors when they are not criminals? Why did they have to pay \$3,000, \$5,000, or \$7,000 to get released when they did nothing wrong even when judges said they should have never been detained? That doesn't seem right. And it's an ongoing atrocity. Our district has never been more resolute in our mission to create worlds of opportunity for each and every learner. All belong; all succeed. We always knew that we had the support of our local community, and never has that been more explicitly shown in tangible and relational ways. Of course, we as educators love our students and families, but never has this been more expressed in word and deed. We are concerned about the ongoing safety of our students, staff, families, and community. We know that the road we are on is long with many challenges today and tomorrow. We know that the harm caused by this Operation Metro Surge is deep educationally, emotionally, and economically. We are undaunted and we believe that if we continue to weave together the resources, creativity and collaboration of many people and organizations, we will come out of this with an even more vibrant and strong community who knows that our strength is in our diversity. Thank you.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you. Madeline Lohman.

Madeline Lohman, *Director of Advocacy, The Advocates for Human Rights* – Thank you for having me on the panel. The Advocates for Human Rights is a nonprofit based in Minneapolis, Minnesota with a goal of making human rights a reality in people's lives around the world. Here in Minnesota, we provide direct legal services for asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, trafficking victims, and people in immigration detention. We also monitor the immigration courts at Fort Snelling and engage in local, state, and federal policy advocacy

**Madeline
Lohman**

*Director of Advocacy,
The Advocates for
Human Rights*

around migrant rights. I think it's important to recognize that everything that happened under Metro Surge was a predictable consequence of an immigration system that has focused on punitive exclusionary policies for decades. The abuse of immigration enforcement served many aims. One goal has been to attack the safety and well-being of Black and Brown communities. We've heard how devastating that has been. Another goal though has been the consolidation of authoritarian control through immigration enforcement — the federal system with the fewest checks on abuse of power. The absence of strong civil rights protections and remedies creates the conditions for something like Metro Surge to happen again. We've seen three main interlocking patterns of human rights violations. First, has been unchecked racial discrimination. We've heard about this from my fellow panelists and I'm sure we will hear much more

today. We've seen policies created that expressly and openly target the Somali community, expanding to the refugee community as a whole, such as the widespread illegal detention of legally resettled refugees. When that was stopped by a federal judge, the federal government shifted to a new rocket docket for Somali asylum seekers. They're not the only community that has been targeted, so we will hear more examples today. Second has been the weaponization of detention to punish opponents and to coerce people into abandoning legitimate claims for representation and immigration status. This administration has reinterpreted and stretched to the limit the language of statutes to try to keep people in detention indefinitely, denying the ability to even request bond. They then failed to uphold any standards for those detention centers. We sued to get access to the detention facility at the Whipple building. And even with several days to clean up their act, when we arrived, we saw dirty, overcrowded cells with trash on the floor, people held overnight with no beds or blankets, and no way for them to call families or attorneys.

Minnesotans have been sent to Texas and died in detention, and we've still heard numerous examples of medical care and medication being denied to people in detention. Presented with a choice between returning to a country where they face persecution but may be able to avoid harm and years of poor food, overcrowded facilities, and lack of medical care. We see case after case in court where people abandon strong asylum cases to gain temporary freedom. The third abuse we've seen is the lack of any accountability mechanism or remedy. The gutting of the oversight offices at the Department of Homeland Security removed one layer of accountability. But an existing layer of accountability that has long been missing is an independent immigration judiciary. We see this when the administration issues a blatantly incorrect interpretation of the law. And immigration judges must fall in line no matter what their independent judgment says, including when those rulings strip due process from people. We saw immigration judges accept dismissals of cases, knowing that ICE was waiting right outside the courtroom to arrest the individual entirely so that they would be forced to restart their case from within immigration detention instead of free in the community. We also saw immigration judges, and they continue to do this, deny cases without even allowing the person to testify and present all of the evidence they have about the harms they might suffer if they face deportation. Those judges also let the government deport people to countries where they have never been, where they are not even citizens. What better way to evade civil rights protections than to send people to a country where there are none.

All of this has been done without passing new laws, which suggests that the problems being exposed are built into the existing system, just pushed to the limits. So the solution here isn't just to roll back some policy memos or change where resources are being spent. We need to rebuild from the ground up and make human and civil rights the foundation of the system with access to independent, impartial, effective, and rapid oversight and accountability. Metro Surge should not be just a failed operation. It should be the catalyst to create a new system because our entire community belongs here and is deserving of safety, dignity, and equality.

“I think it’s important to recognize that everything that happened under Metro Surge was a predictable consequence of an immigration system that has focused on punitive exclusionary policies for decades.”

– Madeline Lohman,
The Advocates for Human Rights



From left to right at the testifying table: Madeline Lohman, Director of Advocacy, The Advocates for Human Rights; Kristen Stuenkel, School District Communications Director, Columbia Heights Public Schools; Mayor Amada Marquez Simula, Mayor of Columbia Heights, MN; Mayor Kaohly Her, Mayor of Saint Paul, MN

Rochelle Garza – Thank you.

Mayor Her – One thing.

Rochelle Garza – Yeah, please go ahead, Mayor Her.

Mayor Her – I just wanted to add one thing, Madam Chair, is that there's a group of our communities here that are asylum seekers and that I think that maybe we want to touch a little bit on that is that. What we were seeing was that our asylum seekers have different paperwork than whether somebody with a green card or somebody who is a citizen and ICE was not trained to actually know what different types of paperwork people have. So, our asylum seekers had all of the proper documentation, but when ICE entered their homes, they did not honor any of those, did not read through them, did not understand them, and detained them. And we have had many, many, many community members who were sent to Texas. And then when they were verified that they had their proper documentation, they just opened the doors and had people leave. And these people had language barriers. They didn't have financial resources, and we had to figure out how to get these people back home here to Minnesota. And so I think it's important for us not to forget that there we have asylum seekers from, you know, many Latin American countries. Our Korean community was highly targeted because of this because they are asylum seekers as well. And so I don't want to forget that group of people as we're testifying here that they had all of their proper documentation, and we saw incident after incident where they were taken and sent to Texas and then we had to figure out how to get them home. So I wanted to make sure that was on the record as well.

Rochelle Garza – Yeah. I guess that leads me to a general question. if you can tease this out more for the public. Is asylum a legal right? Do people have a legal right to seek asylum here?

Mayor Her – Absolutely. I mean, I think that maybe our lawyer over here might have a better answer. I understand it as being that they have every right to come to our country to seek asylum here if they're experiencing persecution or situations in their country that are a danger to them. But I may be able to defer to our friend here.

Madeline Lohman – Yeah. So that's one of the groups that we work with — asylum seekers. And it's not just a statute in US law, though it is a longstanding principle of international law that you cannot be returned to a country where you will face persecution for your political opinion, your religion, race, nationality, or other particular identity like gender, sexual orientation... a whole range of things that are intrinsic to the person that we recognize as not being something you should suffer harm because of. So the US passed

the Refugee Act... it includes the right to asylum and it means that when someone arrives in our country, they have an opportunity to defend themselves from being sent back to a country where they're going to face harm. It's an absolutely legal right, and the people that the Mayor has been talking about have followed the exact process that was laid out to them. They are engaging in a legal process. They're following all the steps they were supposed to and the rules are being changed on them in the middle of the game for no reason. There's been no rationale offered for this. They've just been denied the ability to follow through the process that they were given from the beginning. And they're doing this without changing the law. They're doing this simply through intimidation and coercion and threats that if the person doesn't abandon their case, they're going to be in detention or they're going to be sent to a country they've never lived in.

Mayor Her – If I could just add one more thing — what we also saw happen was them changing tactics and telling asylum seekers that they should come in for a check-in at the Whipple building and then when they came in they were taken. So people were really conflicted as they were calling my office saying if we don't go in, we're worried that our case won't move forward and then if we do go in we're we've been told that people have been detained and so it left people in a really tough position and many people who went in for those check-ins were taken and were sent to Texas. So I mean they were just constantly changing their tactics and continuing to violate people's rights to this process.

Rochelle Garza – Well, thank you all so much for your testimony. I really appreciate it, and I appreciate all the work that was done around Liam and all the other children that are nameless and that we don't get to see that have been impacted by this. So, thank you. We're going to transition to our next panel, but we're going to take a few minutes to do that. I think folks that are on the second panel or panel 1B as a continuation of this one... I think you'll know who you are if you want to go ahead and transition up.

Rochelle Garza – Hi everyone. Just a quick announcement before we begin, if you are logged on to the Wi-Fi, please log off so that the streaming can continue and so we make sure that the audience can see it. Alright, we're going to go ahead and transition to the next part of our initial panel on immigration enforcement. And the folks that I have in front of me are Liliana Letran-Garcia, Luis Argueta, Edwin Torres, JaNae Bates Imari, and Dr. Yohuru Williams. So we'll go ahead and begin with Lilliana if you would get us started. Thank you.

Liliana Letran-Garcia, CEO and President, CLUES – Good afternoon and thank you and thank you to the Hispanic Federation for convening this important conversation. My name is Liliana Letran-Garcia and I am the CEO and president of Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES), Minnesota's largest Latino-led nonprofit. For more than 45 years, CLUES has served as a trusted bridge between Latino communities and the systems that create opportunity in our state. Each year we serve over 30,000 individuals and families — supporting education, workforce participation, economic mobility, and family well-being across Minnesota. Because of this work, we have a clear view of the realities families are experiencing on the ground. Over the past several months, we have observed a noticeable shift in how immigration enforcement is being experienced across our community. These developments have created a heightened sense of uncertainty and vulnerability for many families, and they are shaping how people move through daily life. At CLUES we hear directly from families navigating these realities every single day.

We see parents hesitant to leave their homes, unsure whether routine activities like going to work, attending school activities or meetings, seeking medical care may expose them or their loved ones to risk. We see workers who contribute to Minnesota's



Liliana Letran-Garcia, President & CEO, CLUES, at the podium.

economy every day carrying the constant concern of whether they will return home safely to their families. We see young people trying to concentrate in school while carrying the emotional weight of uncertainty inside their households. And importantly, these concerns extend far beyond one segment of the Latino community. They affect families across income levels, professions, and immigration status — from construction workers and hospitality employees to entrepreneurs, professionals, and mixed-status families

“When enforcement actions occur, the consequences rarely affect just one person. They can disrupt entire families, creating sudden financial instability and hardship, childcare challenges, housing insecurity, and significant emotional stress.”

–Liliana Letran-Garcia, CLUES

who are deeply rooted in Minnesota’s social and economic fabric. When enforcement actions occur, the consequences rarely affect just one person. They can disrupt entire families, creating sudden financial instability and hardship, childcare challenges, housing insecurity, and significant emotional stress. In some cases, we are seeing young people stepping into responsibilities no child should have to carry. When a parent is detained or unable to work, teenagers sometimes feel compelled to step out of a school temporarily in order to help support their families financially. These are young people with dreams for their future — students who want to graduate, pursue careers, and contribute to their communities, but who suddenly feel responsible for keeping their households afloat. These ripple effects extend far beyond one family. They reach schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, places of worship and local economies.

At CLUES, we see the impact clearly in the rising demand for support services. Over the past year, we have expanded efforts to help families navigate these challenges by providing food assistance, housing and stabilization and support, legal referrals, and culturally responsive mental health support. These demands for these services have grown significantly, not only because families need material assistance, but because they are searching for accurate information, trusted guidance, and stability during moments of uncertainty. We must also recognize the profound emotional impact on children and families. Children absorb the stress their parents carry. Teachers and counselors reported students struggling to focus. Families experience ongoing anxiety that affects their ability to plan for the future. Prosperity cannot be separated from psychological safety. When families live with persistent uncertainty, it becomes more difficult for them to fully participate in the workforce, invest in their education, grow businesses, and contribute their full potential to our communities.

At the same time, we’re also witnessing the strength of our communities across Minnesota — faith leaders, nonprofit counselors, educators, and local organizations are working together to ensure families remain connected to reliable information and essential services. This network of support has become an important stabilizing force during the challenging moment, but the reality is that community organizations cannot shoulder this responsibility alone. Minnesota has received significant national attention related to immigration enforcement, yet beyond the headlines, there is a quieter reality that deserves equal attention. Families are trying to live their lives with stability and dignity. They are trying to raise their children, maintain employment, contribute to their neighborhoods, and build a future in the state they call home. The Latino community is an essential part of Minnesota’s economic growth, cultural vitality, and future prosperity. Ensuring that families can live, work, and participate in their communities without constant fear is not only a humanitarian concern. It is also a matter of long-term community stability, economic well-being of our state. Organizations like ours, like CLUES, remain committed to supporting families through accurate information, trusted services, and community connection. Every day, we witness the resilience, determination, and hope that define Latino families in Minnesota. Our responsibility, and our opportunity is to ensure that these families continue to have the stability, support, and dignity they need to thrive. Because when families are stable, communities are stronger. And when communities are stronger, Minnesota and the country are stronger. Thank you for the opportunity to share this perspective today.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you. Dr. Williams.

Dr. Yohuru Williams, *Racial Justice Initiative, University of St. Thomas in Minnesota* –

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Dr. Yohuru Williams and I'm a historian and founding director of the Racial Justice Initiative at the University of St. Thomas. My work focuses on civil rights and a long struggle to align American institutions with the democratic values and ideals they claim to uphold. One of the things that we like to tell people at the Racial Justice Initiative is that history doesn't repeat itself — it echoes. And those echoes are either indictments or invitations. They're indictments when we fail to appreciate the danger represented in repeating the mistakes of the past. They're invitations when we recognize the harder work of making a continued commitment to justice and equality. As a historian, I approach moments like this not simply as isolated policy debates, but as part of a longer American story, one that repeatedly asks how a democracy balances enforcement power with the protection of civil rights and civil liberties.

Dr. Yohuru Williams

*Racial Justice Initiative,
University of St. Thomas
in Minnesota*

American history offers many examples of moments when enforcement authority expanded dramatically in response to national anxiety or security concerns. Immigration policy and immigration enforcement have often been central to those moments. One example occurred during World War I when the federal government passed laws such as the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918. These laws were framed as necessary to protect national security during wartime, but they were also used to silence dissent and to target immigrant activists and labor organizers. One of the most prominent figures affected by this crackdown was the immigrant activist Emma Goldman. And I should note Emma Goldman's experience is important because as a woman, even though Liam Ramos has become the face of the abuses of ICE in this community, I fear when the reckoning happens and we learn about the experiences of women and girls in particular, that that reckoning will have an ominous tone. But back to Emma

Goldman, when she was deported, she offered a warning that continues to resonate today. She said, and I quote, "We say that if America's entered the war to make the world safe for democracy, she must first make democracy safe in America. How else is the world to take America seriously when democracy at home is daily being outraged, free speech suppressed, peaceful assemblies broken up? When the free press is curtailed and every independent opinion gagged, verily poor as we are in democracy, how can we give it to the world?" End quote. Goldman's words reflect a broader historical concern that moments of crisis contest the nation's commitment to its own democratic principles.

A generation later, the United States faced another moment when national security fears reshaped government authority. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the federal government issued Executive Order 9066, which led to the force removal and incarceration, and I think that word is important,

"History doesn't repeat itself — it echoes. And those echoes are either indictments or invitations. They're indictments when we fail to appreciate the danger represented in repeating the mistakes of the past. They're invitations when we recognize the harder work of making a continued commitment to justice and equality."

– Dr. Yohuru Williams, Racial Justice Initiative, University of St. Thomas

of more than 120,000 Japanese Americans, most of them — US citizens. Entire families were relocated to detention camps across the country without individual trials or evidence of wrongdoing. Again, history doesn't repeat itself, but it echoes. At the time, the policy was widely justified as a necessary wartime measure to protect the homeland. Yet, in later decades, congressional investigations concluded that the incarceration was not driven by military necessity, but by racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.

In 1988, the federal government formally apologized through the Civil Liberties Act, acknowledging the injustice and providing reparations to surviving detainees. I fear what the future holds for us when

that insufficient apology will come and the reparations come due for all who've been abused, not just in Minnesota, but nationally. From a historical perspective, that episode reminds us that policies enacted during moments of fear or urgency can have consequences that the nation later recognizes as violations of its own constitutional values.

Another consistent pattern in civil rights history is the role communities play in documenting these experiences. I remind this group, but I shouldn't have to, that the first constitutional observer was actually Darnella Frazier in 2020 when she captured the assault on George Floyd by Derek Chauvin. And that that process of documenting those injuries, not just to individuals, but to communities is important. When enforcement powers expand, communities often become the first witness to how policies are implemented on the ground. Through American history, civil rights advocates, journalists, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens have worked to record these experiences, sometimes through testimony, affidavit, photographs, or community reports. We saw this during the civil rights movement when activists carefully documented arrests, intimidation, and policing practices. Those records later became essential evidence in legal challenges, and policy reform. Many of the civil rights protections Americans rely on today emerged because people insisted that their experiences be recorded and preserved. That is why hearings like this one play such an important role. Public testimony ensures that a broad range of voices become part of the historical record. It allows individuals to speak about their experiences, provide policymakers with important information, and create documentation that future scholars like myself, journalists, and institutions can examine.

History shows that when testimony is preserved, it strengthens democratic oversight. It ensures that the story of what happened is not told only through official reports, but also through the lived experience of the communities most directly affected. Moments like this matter because the full impact of enforcement policies often become clear only with time. The choices made now, how policies are implemented, how concerns are addressed, and how carefully the public record is preserved will shape how this period is understood in the future. It will not only influence legal debates, policy reforms, and broader national conversations about civil rights and public safety, but also become the foundation for the way that we think about the nation's history and its continuing struggle to live up to these ideals — particularly pertinent as we just celebrated the 100th anniversary of Black History Month, and this summer will recognize the

“Many of the civil rights protections Americans rely on today emerged because people insisted that their experiences be recorded and preserved.”

– Dr. Yohuru Williams, Racial Justice Initiative, University of St. Thomas

250th birth of the United States. For historians, documentation is essential. It allows future generations to understand not only what decisions were made, but how a democratic society responded when questions of power, rights, and accountability were placed before it.

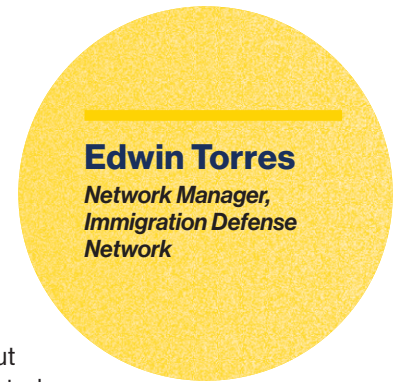
That is why the work of listening, documenting, testimony, and preserving the historical record is so important today. It also resonates with what the Kerner Commission was tasked with determining way back in 1967. What happened? Why did it happen? How can we prevent it from happening again? In this moment, I hope that instead of why or how we can prevent it from happening again, what we say is never again. Thank you.



From left to right: Liliana Letran-Garcia, President & CEO, CLUES, and Dr. Yohuru Williams, Founding Director of the Racial Justice Initiative, University of St. Thomas, Minnesota.

Rochelle Garza – Edwin.

Edwin Torres, *Network Manager, Immigration Defense Network* – Good afternoon, Chairwoman and thank you all for being here and thank you to my colleagues here. You're going to hear a lot today. My name is Edwin Torres de Santiago, and I help lead the Immigrant Defense Network, a statewide coalition of over 100 immigrant, labor, faith, legal organizations working together to defend the constitutional rights of immigrants across Minnesota.



But before I give my testimony and the work of a network, I want to speak about why this work is so personal to me. For 25 years of my life, I lived undocumented in this country. I know what it means to be in hiding. I know what it means to live in both worlds in a permanent state of limbo. And I know what it means every day to wake up wondering if today is the last day I would see my mom, my dad, or my brothers. Right now, even after all these years, I'm still living in that reality. For the last two months, my parents were in hiding because of the current wave of immigration enforcement that happened in our great state of Minnesota. Hiding is not something that people choose lightly, but hiding is what families do when the system meant to protect them becomes the very thing they fear the most. Hiding is also a form of resistance. It is families protecting each other. It is communities refusing to disappear. It is survival. I saw my parents for the first time two weeks ago.

That moment should never have been uncertain. And yet for thousands of families across Minnesota today, that uncertainty is still a daily reality. Because the truth is the enforcement tactics we are seeing today and have seen for the last 90 days are not just aggressive — they are truly traumatizing to our entire communities and those of us who are working to document these abuses are increasingly becoming targets ourselves. I have personally been followed by ICE agents for five hours. They have shown up on my doorsteps numerous times. My personal information has been doxed online and I've received threats while serving as a constitutional observer doing nothing more than documenting government activity in public spaces. I've been shoved and pushed by ICE agents. I've been hit by rubber bullets. I've been tear gassed dozens of times. And during a violent ICE raid in North Minneapolis that led to one of our neighbors being shot in the leg around hundreds of other constitutional observers. Federal agents deployed more than 18 flashbangs, grenades directly into the crowd.

Dozens of observers have been injured. These are not criminals. These are community members exercising their constitutional rights. So, when we talk about immigration enforcement in Minnesota, we're not just talking about policy. We're talking about human lives, civil liberties, and the fundamental question of whether constitutional protections still apply to everyone in this country — keyword, everyone.

Over the past year, the Immigrant Defense Network has focused on several critical things. First, training constitutional observers to safely document enforcement activity. We didn't create this. We learned it from national leaders from NDLO in California to partners in Chicago to those in Louisiana to those in Oregon. Second, we've built a rapid response system so families know their rights, businesses know their rights, and they're not facing these moments alone. Our role is simple but essential — to document what is happening on the ground, ensure communities understand their rights and create accountability when those rights are violated. And what we have documented over the last year should concern everyone who believes in civil rights and constitutional protections. Over the last 92 days, Minnesota has experienced one of the most aggressive immigration enforcement operations that our state and country has ever seen. Under Operation Metro Surge, immigration enforcement activities escalated to levels unseen before. More than 4,000 people have been arrested in Minnesota just in this operation. In total, more than 11,000 of our neighbors have been taken since this administration took office from our state of Minnesota. In Minnesota alone, over the last 90 days, that averages about 60 arrests every day.

For families, this has not felt like routine enforcement. It has felt like federal occupation of our communities. We've had more ICE agents in Minneapolis and the Twin Cities than the police force of our largest 10 cities.

We have seen increased street enforcements, aggressive tactics used against our neighbors, families detained basically by doing nothing and then asked questions later. Results are a level of fear that is difficult to describe. Parents are afraid to take their children to school. Workers are afraid to go to their jobs. Families are afraid to seek medical care. And when entire communities are forced to live under fear, everyone's rights are under attack. Because of this, the Immigrant Defense Network along with all of our partners to date have trained a little over 32,000 constitutional observers including representation from 82 of our 87 counties in Minnesota and more than 3,000 observers in Wisconsin, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Iowa. And we're in regular communication with them on a weekly basis.

Our hotline has also documented a scale of fear. During Operation Metro Surge, the Immigrant Defense Network line received over 17,000 calls, averaging 334 calls every single day. That is a call every three and a half minutes. These are not abstract numbers. These are parents calling for someone taken from their home. These are workers calling because ICE was seen near the workplace. These are children calling because they have not seen their parents come home.

Constitutional observers have a vital role in our communities. They do not interfere with federal enforcement activity. They are simply documenting what is happening. They record the date, the time, the location, the behavior of the officers, do they have a warrant, whether legal procedures were followed. Mind you, our trainings are three hours long and 32,000 people have sat through those trainings. Why does this matter? Because documentation protects civil rights. When enforcement agencies know they're being observed, it increases transparency. When violations occur, documentation assures that there's a public record and that public record is essential for legal accountability, policy reforms, and public awareness.

Even in the midst of this crisis, communities across Minnesota have responded with extraordinary solidarity. Mutual aids have been created in the dozens and many networks including the Immigrant Defense Network launched an emergency fundraising effort. We have raised a little over \$1.5 million over the last two months. Every single dollar raised goes directly to families for rent support, food access, emergency stabilization, direct home health care visits. We have dozens of doctors going directly to people's homes. Mental health because that cannot be forgotten. To date, we have released over \$700,000 to communities. We are processing about 1,200 families for rent support — that totals a little over a million dollars. Ten food shelves across Minnesota are getting aid.

And I want to be clear: charity or donation should never have should never have to replace justice and accountability. This People's Hearing is important because our communities deserve to be heard. Too often, immigration enforcement happens in the shadows. We haven't even started to know what happened to the 40 people that have died inside detention centers. Families suffer in silence. Civil rights go undocumented. Today is about changing that narrative and I want to thank you for making the trip with national leaders to hear these stories. What we are witnessing is a part of a larger pattern of enforcement practices that demand transparency and accountability. We're asking for something very basic — protect our constitutional rights, transparency in enforcement practices, accountability when harm occurs because no one should live in fear. And I will say it here, we're far due for a comprehensive immigration reform in this country. We deserve dignity. We deserve safety. And damn it, we reserve justice. Thank you.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you so much. Luis, do you want to kick us off?

“When we talk about immigration enforcement in Minnesota, we’re not just talking about policy. We’re talking about human lives, civil liberties, and the fundamental question of whether constitutional protections still apply to everyone in this country — keyword, everyone.”

– Edwin Torres,
Immigration Defense Network

Luis Argueta, *Communications Director, Unidos Minnesota / Monarca* – Yes.

Thank you. Thank you, Chair Garza, and thank you to everyone in this room that's made this hearing possible. So, my name is Luis Argueta and I serve as communications director at Unidos MN. I'm here today representing Unidos MN, our mixed status membership and the thousands of Minnesotans who have participated in our Monarca constitutional observing program. Unidos MN is a multi-racial coalition of people and the largest Latino-led constituency organization in Minnesota. And through our voter engagement programs, rapid response networks, and community leadership development, we work to ensure that everyday people can participate in democracy and defend the constitutional rights that belong to each and every one of us. The constitution does not begin with the government.

It begins with we the people — and that means all of us workers, parents, students, small business owners, neighbors. *Nosotros la gente*. The rights protected by the constitution are not conditional. They do not depend on immigration status or zip code or whether a person is popular with those in power. They exist precisely to protect people from abuses of power. And this is why Unidos MN created the Monarca project.

Through Monarca's rapid response, 50,000 everyday Minnesotans have been trained as constitutional observers with over 50 of our core leaders in a number of committees that have made this possible over the past almost 13 or 14 months. These are everyday people who peacefully and lawfully document government activity. They help ensure transparency. They help neighbors understand their rights. And they're making sure that people understand enforcement actions when they're occurring in our communities. But during Operation Metro Surge, many of these observers experienced something deeply disturbing. They experienced retaliation. Observers who were clearly identifiable... they were operating lawfully — they reported being followed by federal agents. Some were ordered to stop filming in public spaces. Others were pushed away from sidewalks and streets where they had every legal right to stand. Several reported being threatened with detention simply for documenting what was happening. Observation is not interference. It is a constitutional right that is protected by the first amendment. And when the act of

witnessing government power becomes ground for intimidation, it signals that something is deeply wrong. We have also heard from constitutional observers and residents about enforcement actions that raise serious concerns. This is why we built the Monarca Fourth Amendment Business Project, which pledges businesses of all sizes to double down on Fourth Amendment protections from unreasonable searches and seizures. Community members reported agents stopping individuals without warrants, questioning people without clear cause and detaining individuals in ways that created confusion about where they were being taken and under what authority.

Some of the individuals caught up in these encounters were US citizens. That should concern every person in this room because we have now

seen the consequences when enforcement operates without clear guard rails. In Minnesota, two people lost their lives during encounters connected to this federal enforcement environment — Renee Good and Alex Pretti. Their deaths demand answers and they remind us that when oversight fails, the risks are not theoretical. They are measured in human lives. Because when federal enforcement operates without transparency, without clear guard rails, and without accountability, it creates conditions where constitutional rights can be violated not only for immigrants, but for anyone. This is why the experiences of people like Patty O'Keefe, Ed Higgins, Wesley Powers, and Ryan Ecklund, matter. These are Minnesotans

Luis Argueta

*Communications
Director, Unidos
Minnesota / Monarca*

“This hearing represents a public record...that communities have been documenting in real time... and demands accountability. Because democracy... survives when we the people participate...when communities document the truth and when we refuse to stay silent in the face of abuses of power.”

– Luis Argueta, Unidos Minnesota / Monarca

who step forward to observe, to document, and protect rights that belong to all of us in this room, to all of us in the state and country. Their experiences demonstrate how easily constitutional protections can erode when oversight is weak and enforcement power expands without limits. Constitutional rights are only meaningful when there are guard rails strong enough to protect them.

Operation Metro Surge has officially ended, but federal agents continue to operate in our communities and families across Minnesota continue to live with the consequences of that operation. What this hearing represents is something very important and it represents a public record, a record that communities have been documenting in real time, a record that asks whether constitutional rights were respected and a record that demands accountability when they were not. Because democracy does not protect itself. It survives when we the people participate — when communities document the truth and when we refuse to stay silent in the face of abuses of power. That is what Minnesotans have done through Monarca and Unidos MN will continue standing with our communities until there is transparency, accountability and respect for the constitutional rights that belong to all of us. *Nosotros la gente. We the people. Thank you.*

Rochelle Garza – JaNae

JaNae Bates Imari, *Minister & Co Director, Faith in Minnesota* – Good afternoon, everyone. I am Minister JaNae Bates Imari. I am the co-executive director with Isaiah and Faith in Minnesota. I am also here not as boisterous as I usually am because I am recovering from very severe pneumonia which I would absolutely argue is a peripheral consequence of living in an occupied state that is also supposed to be a free state here in the United States. Our organization, Isaiah and Faith in Minnesota are organizations that organize communities of faith, small businesses, including childcare centers, and just people of good faith across the state. One of those communities is our Islamic mosques. We organize about 40 Islamic mosques across the state. The majority of them have many many many Somalis.



**JaNae Bates
Imari**
*Minister & Co Director,
Faith in Minnesota*

It is no surprise to many of us in this room that one of the many communities that was used to validate the heinous and horrific acts from the mass militia that has been wreaking havoc here was the Somali community. It was largely about pushing all of our communities into a space and place where we did not trust one another, where we believed that it was okay to throw certain people under the bus. And that has a very long standing and it is a horrible tactic that we've seen used in this country many times over and it is one that we absolutely as Minnesotans did all that we could to fight back against. And that is why it was also so important that communities of faith, people of faith stood up and named how important it is for many of us, almost all of our texts, our spiritual and scriptural texts, talk about the necessity of welcoming the stranger, of loving our neighbor, of caring for the poor. And if we are truly called to do that, it is extremely important that we do that, especially at times when there is something happening completely counter to that. And when that is done in the name of our country and in the name of our state and in the name of our cities. And so what we found in faith communities is that they had to do that in remarkable ways. Most certainly they showed up for people who attend their churches, their mosques, their synagogues — those who were terrified to show up for prayer, to show up for services, worried that they would be picked up by ICE. And to be clear, this cut across people's status. There were folks who were undocumented, who were afraid to go to worship services, but there were also many documented and even citizens who look like me who were afraid to go to service. There is a black pastor in North Minneapolis who is and whose family are descendants of enslaved people. And he was pulled over by ICE while going to attend a worship service. And it was not until the agents saw that he had on a clergy collar that they felt that it was they who were satisfied to walk away and say, "Oh, he's not Somali."

We have had imams who have shown up with us together at vigils for Renee Good and Alex Pretti at one of our vigils while we were in the midst of prayer and lament together — they had to step away because one of their congregants of their mosque, an elderly woman was taken by ICE. And in the midst of her being taken, she had a medical episode, and so while she was handcuffed to her bed in the hospital, she slipped into a

coma. And while the imams were trying to get there to be able to support her and pray with her, they learned that ICE agents changed her name in the hospital so that her family and loved ones could not be there to support her. It is reprehensible.

As you have heard earlier from Mayor Her in the city of St. Paul, but all across the state there were many people who were taken who once taken who once shackled, put on planes, taken out of our state, sent to places like Texas where there are horrible and heinous conditions in which they have to stay. They then learn that they actually should have never been taken at all and were unceremoniously excused from that center but with no way to return back to their state of Minnesota. Many clergy found that there were several people who work at the airport who were taken while lawfully working their lawful jobs taken from that place and sent away, who were taken and sent away to these spaces in Texas. And so these clergy, hundreds of clergy gathered together in January on the coldest day of the year to pray for our neighbors, for our loved ones, for our community members who are frankly even now still being under surveillance, still being put into a spirit of fear because of political tactics that actually have little to nothing to do with immigration. Those clergy, those faith leaders did so and continue to do so... praying and lifting up their voices and bearing witness even to the point of arrest. Not because they want to be arrested, but because we know how important it is that we lift up our voices.

“One of the many communities that was used to validate the heinous and horrific acts from the mass militia that has been wreaking havoc here was the Somali community.”

– JaNae Bates Imari,
Minister & Co Director, Faith in Minnesota

We know how important it is that we not be silenced and that no Minnesotan can sit back and allow these kinds of horrific and evil actions to continue to take place here. It has been a true honor to watch the kind of sermon that has taken place in the state of Minnesota during these last several months. While we have all experienced some of the most horrible and terrifying things that we have ever seen, you have met... all of you have heard the many violations to people’s civil rights and human rights. We have also witnessed the greatest human spirit that has ever taken place in my lifetime. And it is my hope and my gratefulness to this committee that these stories continue to be told, that more and more truth commissions continue to take place so that we never get to a place where we are not just repeating history but echoing it. Thank you.

Rochelle Garza – I just want to say thank you to each and every one of you for coming here today and sharing your perspectives. I did want to give you an opportunity if anybody wanted to add anything based on what you’ve heard from others. I think we had an interesting exchange earlier about what you’re actually seeing and you know just the impact on everybody. I mean this is impacting your economy. It’s impacting individuals. I mean I have so many questions on the observers, right? I mean just exercising your



Testifying from left to right: Lilitana Letran-Garcia, President & CEO, CLUES; Dr. Yohuru Williams, Founding Director of the Racial Justice Initiative, University of St. Thomas, Minnesota; Edwin Torres, Network Manager, Immigration Defense Network; Luis Argueta, Communications Director, Unidos Minnesota / Monarca; and JaNae Bates Imari, Minister & Co Director, Faith in Minnesota.

constitutional right to observe. I mean what I'm hearing from you all is people are being followed. People are being intimidated and these are folks that are outside the scope of ICE enforcement ostensibly. And I don't think that that is making its way into the public sphere. So if anyone wanted to comment a little further on any of that, I just want to give you the floor.

Luis Argueta – You've heard all the folks that we mentioned, I mean quite a bit of overreach has occurred and from what many people probably in this space have heard these agents have been given access to tools that they should not even be accessing at all. They're able to pull up plate records. They're able to essentially follow a lot of these observers home. Edwin just shared it himself that he's had these agents show up at their door. Ryan Ecklund actually shares a similar testimony where he was out there observing and then he had agents follow him directly to his home in a very secluded outlet in Woodbury. It's a suburban city out here in the Twin Cities. It's very hard to kind of find his home really, I ended up seeing it on the map. But they're using technology. They're using data that they shouldn't have access to. If that's not overreaching, then I don't know what is. I think that's really why I focused a lot of what I shared on guard rails. We have an agency like ICE that has only been around for a little over 20 years that came and was established right after 9/11. And there really are very few guards and checks and balances on this very new agency. So I think that it is a problem when you now have an administration that has weaponized it and given it quite a budget as well to do what it may or what it will.

Edwin Torres – Yeah. The only thing and thank you Luis for that very good response since at the end of the day is the retaliation that we're seeing at the hands of federal governments not just on our observers but the

“Everyone at this table and everyone who you will hear from today who is managing or leading any of these organizations knows that they're doing it at great risk.”

– Edwin Torres,
Immigration Defense Network

actual organizations that are doing this work too. Everyone at this table and everyone who you will hear from today who is managing or leading any of these organizations knows that they're doing it at great risk. We already know the retaliation to our elected officials. We've seen the indictments. We've seen the subpoenas to appear in front of Congress. But they've also started to send FBI agents to arrest our individuals. It is deeply troubling and scary that when you simply... they have guns and weapons, we have a book and a whistle because what we're doing to document these abuses was met with a level of retaliation that deeply is meant to scare you, so you stop doing what you're doing. But in Minnesota, we said no. In Minnesota, right after they killed our neighbor, our hotline and our intake to be trained went up close to 20,000 people. Combined together, we're talking about north of 100,000 people have been trained somewhere by someone in any corner of our state. Minnesota decided and thank

you to Dr. Williams. A lot of people ask us, we just came back from Selma and a lot of people have asked us, “How did you all do it in Minnesota?” And in reality, it is because Minnesota has been in the middle of this country's heartbreak year after year after year because of the killing and the public execution of George Floyd. Many groups organized and that organizing hasn't stopped for six years. So, I just want to name that even being here we all often times have to decide whether we do that or we don't do that because I don't know what's going to happen in a form of retaliation to our organizations and that of the people that work in these organizations and our constitutional observers.

Dr. Yohuru Williams – Very quickly three things although I think Edwin expressed it beautifully. The other challenge for us is that it felt like a betrayal in a sense we waited at the end of 2024 for the finalization of a consent decree, a federal consent decree around constitutional policing, which the Trump administration promptly walked away from in April. And then in May, on the fifth-year anniversary of the murder of George Floyd, already started implementing what we saw in the form of Operation Metro Surge in other communities. And so here we were dependent on the federal government to come in and utilize the guardrails of the US Constitution to set a standard for policing here, which this community was already suffering with, and what we got was the commencement of Operation Metro Surge where the very government which was supposed to be the key to holding local police accountable became the instrument of the destruction

of the very foundations of what we assume as our constitution protects us from those abuses. So I think it's that layered layers for Minnesotans in particular — the feeling that we have been betrayed and that we find ourselves in the midst of this operation metro surge which hasn't ended and when people ask I worry that although I'm proud of the mutual aid and the other things that we've done as a state Edwin named it beautifully that came on the heels of this tragedy that happened in 2020. We have to resist the desire for a tragedy with a happy ending. Americans love a tragedy with a happy ending. We have a sitcom understanding of our history when everything is wrapped up in 30 minutes or less with commercials. And there is no happy ending here without true accountability around those who exercise power in terms of policing, adequate housing, dealing with immigration in a humane manner. And in that sense, I think what we're hoping is that Minnesota is the beginning of the conversation and that this doesn't become what George Floyd was — this opportunity for people to celebrate the conviction of Derek Chauvin, but not to get the reform that we need in all these other areas.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you. Thank you. Very well said. Liliana, I just had one question. What was the increase in services you had to give to folks? If you have a number.

Liliana Letran-Garcia – Absolutely. So, probably around 150%. Many of our families really depleted the entire savings that they have for emergencies and ended up calling and asking us for help. CLUE's response is not just only giving a check but really building relationships with landlords and mortgage companies to see if there's any repayment programs or any reduction of rents in which they could help our families. We are supporting families again not only with you know a rent payment or a box of food but we're sitting down with them to talk about budgeting in crisis, talking about what is plan B, C and D. It is incredibly difficult because coaching or counseling sessions that were taking only 30-45 minutes prior to Operation Metro Surge now is a two-hour counseling session. Mental health services have increased tremendously with not enough monetary support to be able to provide those counseling sessions because some of our community members do not have medical assistance or insurance. So, we have stretched every single resource. We're thinking outside of the box to try to meet the demand, but the heartache is real.

Rochelle Garza – Yeah. Thank you for sharing that. Thank you to each of you for being here, for sharing your perspective, sharing the truth. Right. This is about hearing from you all. This is about documenting. This is about making sure that nobody forgets. And I mean, you said it beautifully that Minnesota isn't the end point, it's the starting point. So, thank you so much.





Testifying from left to right: Raha Wala, Vice President, Strategy & Partnerships, National Immigration Law Center, and Aarti Kohli, Executive Director, Asian Law Caucus.

PANEL 2

National Immigration Enforcement, Detention, and Civil Rights Impacts

Rochelle Garza – We’re going to transition to a second panel, and for those that are just joining us... this is the People’s Hearing on Immigration Enforcement. We’re hearing from different panelists to discuss what is happening, what has happened, and is continuing to happen in Minnesota. So, we’ll go ahead and transition. So, this next panel regarding national immigration enforcement, detention and civil rights impacts examines how local enforcement practices connect to the broader national immigration enforcement and detention system. Many arrests that have been carried out here in Minnesota ultimately end up in detention facilities located far from the communities where individuals live and work. Families have reported loved ones being transferred to detention centers in other states including Texas, my home state, to facilities like Dilley and Camp East Montana. We’ve heard testimony to that effect from earlier and advocates have raised serious concerns about conditions, and they continue to raise those concerns within those facilities including access to medical care, legal representation and the ability of families to maintain contact with detained relatives. So this panel is going to examine how local cases may influence national legal developments, including ongoing debates surrounding expedited deportations and due process protections. These issues highlight how enforcement actions in a single city can ripple across the national immigration system. So, it’s not just local, it impacts the entire country. So each panelist, you have five to seven minutes to present your testimony. We have before us Aarti Kohli, the Executive Director of Asian Law Caucus, Raha Wala, the Vice President of the National Immigration Law Center, and we have Daniel Daniel Hatoum — the Senior Supervising Attorney from the Beyond Borders program at the Texas Civil Rights Project. So, we can go ahead and start with Aarti if you want to kick us off.

Aarti Kohli, *Executive Director, Asian Law Caucus* – Sure. Thank you, Commissioner Garza, the Miranda family, and all of the local partners, for having me here. Before I say anything else, I want to acknowledge everyone in this room and across Minnesota who is showing up for each other. My name is Aarti Kohli. I’m the Executive Director of the Asian Law Caucus, the nation’s first civil rights organization for Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. We are a law, policy, and impact litigation organization. We

Aarti Kohli
*Executive Director,
Asian Law Caucus*

fight in federal courts. We help shape policy at the state and national level, and we work in coalition with organizations across the country. Some of our founders were children of Japanese Americans who were incarcerated during World War II. They built this organization because they knew what happens when a government decides an entire community is the enemy. They also knew that communities who organize, who document, who refuse to be silent, those are the communities that prevail. So, I want to start today with a story about a man named Nurul Amin Shah Alam. Nurul was a 56-year-old Rohingya Muslim refugee from Burma — a member of a community the United States government has recognized as survivors of genocide. He had been in this country legally since December 2024. He was nearly blind. He spoke little English. One day, Nurul went to buy a curtain rod to use as a walking stick. On his way home, he ended up on the wrong porch. The homeowner called the police. The police arrested him without providing an interpreter, without making any real effort to understand who he was or what had happened. A nearly blind refugee with a curtain rod was criminalized because no one bothered to find out the truth. He was held at the Erie County facility in Buffalo. He was then moved over to Border Patrol. Border Patrol eventually realized that he was not subject to deportation. But instead of calling his family or his lawyer, they dropped him off alone at a Tim Hortons 5 miles from his home in freezing weather, telling no one. Five days later, his body was found near a hockey arena in downtown Buffalo. Border Patrol bears ultimate responsibility. They are the ones who left a vulnerable man alone in the cold. But the chain of failure started earlier with a police encounter that provided no interpreter, no understanding, no basic humanity.

At every step, someone could have made a different choice. That is the story of what is happening nationally... a system of choices made deliberately that strips people of their dignity and their rights. Everyone in this country is entitled to due process not as a privilege — as a right and this administration is dismantling it step by step. I will come back to Nurul's story at the end.

And what I've heard today is what I know is to be true. What is happening in Minnesota is part of a deliberate national pattern. You all know this. You've been living it, organizing against it, and documenting it with remarkable courage.

What I want to add is that I do see something shifting. Americans across the country are starting to ask hard questions about what their government is actually doing. Courts are pushing back. Whistleblowers are coming forward. The more we connect what is happening in Minnesota to that national reckoning, the harder it becomes for this administration to operate in the dark. So, I'm going to talk briefly about how detention is being used as a weapon. The detained population has grown 75% in the past year. Over 68,000 people in a system that is deliberately inhumane. Thirty people died in ICE detention in 2025. It's the deadliest year on record, and I have no doubt that unfortunately 2026 will be worse. The oversight offices that used to exist have been gutted. I was actually involved in the case of a 73-year-old Indian grandmother transferred overnight from California to Georgia away from her family and her lawyer. She was vegetarian. When she asked for food for her medication, they gave her cubes of ice. She slept on a cement block, and they transported her back to India in shackles on over a 20-hour flight. The detention system is designed to break people down until they agree to leave. So many operate without a lawyer, without understanding what they're signing, hundreds of miles away from their families. So, in a case in Minnesota of a man named Oscar who a judge had actually ordered to be released even after a judge had ordered his release, ICE was pressuring him to self-deport. And because he had been able to communicate with family and know that he had been ordered released, he resisted signing the papers. But it's not because ICE told him. And so this is happening over and over again. There is constant misrepresentation and outright lies.

ICE is now purchasing empty warehouses across the country and converting them into detention facilities. These are warehouses for keeping boxes like an Amazon warehouse. Communities across the country will

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—Aarti Kohli,
Asian Law Caucus

be asked to issue permits for turning these facilities to now warehouse human beings. They will have choices. This will also become a local decision. And so I want communities to understand you have a say in this.

The next point I want to talk about is... we've talked a lot today about the constitution, but I want to add a little bit more. There is deliberate top-down lawlessness happening within this administration. The administration is fully aware that they are violating the Constitution. A former ICE attorney resigned and testified before Congress that ICE leadership issued a memo instructing agents that they could enter people's homes using an administrative warrant, a document that has no judicial authority and that doesn't meet the Fourth Amendment standard. That instruction directly contradicted the written training materials that high ICE had and they refused to give their own staff copies of that memo, but they wanted them to teach ICE trainees that they could break down people's doors. They knew it was unconstitutional, but they taught it anyway. Federal judges, including Judge Blackwell right here in Minnesota, have ordered people released and watched those orders get ignored. People who show up to document or protest immigration enforcement are being charged with assaulting federal officers. And you all have talked about this earlier today, but the important thing to remember is the vast majority of charges do not hold up. But we know what the goal is... the goal is not necessarily conviction. The goal is silence.

There are a myriad of ways they're attacking the constitution. We are co-counsel in *Barbara V. Trump* — the birthright citizenship case before the Supreme Court. The administration is attempting to end birthright citizenship which is enshrined in the 14th amendment by executive order. This is a right that has existed for the entirety of the United States but for over 150 years for all Americans. We have won a nationwide injunction, and we will be in front of the Supreme Court on April 1st. And it is very very important that all Americans show up to fight for not just the right for birthright citizenship, but for all the different rights that we've talked about today, including due process.

So, what can communities do? I'm just going to name four things. I'm sure there are many more. First, know how your local police interact with ICE. Nurul's story didn't begin with the border patrol. It began with a police officer who didn't call an interpreter and a system that criminalized a man rather than helping him. That local failure handed him to the federal system. Your law enforcement must provide interpretation, must adhere to due process, and cannot engage in racial profiling. Your tax dollars do not have to fund a pipeline from local police to federal immigration enforcement. To all Americans, find out where your city, county, and state stand and hold them accountable. Second, if ICE tries to place a detention facility in your community, fight it... demand inspection rights... make them answer for what happens inside. This is a local decision with national consequences. Third, follow the money. Operation Metro Surge here in the Twin Cities cost an estimated \$18 million a week. While people in many states cannot afford groceries, gas, or a doctor's visit, ask your elected officials what you are buying with that money and whether it is making anyone safer. Fourth and certainly not least, fund legal defense, including habeas representation. A habeas petition forces the government to bring a person before a court and justify why they are being held. It is one of the oldest constitutional protections we have. It is what has gotten numerous members of our families and communities out before they have been transferred away from us. There are not enough lawyers filing them right now and this is something that communities can help fix. I've also heard today that communities across this state have trained 50,000 constitutional observers — people who show up, who bear witness, who document what is happening so that it cannot be denied or erased. And we all know those observers have faced retaliation for doing so. That tells you everything you need to know about what this administration fears. It fears you. Our founders built the Asian Law Caucus in the wake of the civil rights movement. They knew that the ark of this country bends towards justice only when people force it to bend. You are those people. We see you from California. We see you from across the country. And we know that you are not going anywhere. Thank you.

Raha Wala, *Vice President Strategy & Partnerships, National Immigration Law Center* – Thank you so much Chair Garza for convening this People's Hearing on the civil and human rights violations of Operation Metro Surge. My name is Raha Wala. I'm the Vice President for Strategy and Partnerships at the National

Raha Wala

*Vice President Strategy
& Partnerships, National
Immigration Law Center*

Immigration Law Center. For nearly a half century, the National Immigration Law Center, also known as NILC, has fought to advance justice, and protect the rights of low-income immigrant communities across the United States. We do federal, advocacy, strategic campaigns, and importantly, we work to empower immigrants and the organizations that represent them to understand their rights and then fight for more just laws and policies at the federal, state, and local levels. So, I live in Washington DC. I'm actually a native Minnesotan, proudly so, I might add, and I come from a family of refugees and immigrants. I'm also a human rights lawyer who specializes in how governments abuse national security and emergency powers to undermine rights. So, if there's one thing my experience has taught me, it's this. The path to authoritarianism is being built on the back of immigrants right now, and the shocking attacks against Minnesotans and so many other communities across the country are proof positive that we are indeed well on our way and have arrived.

“The shocking, senseless murders of Renee Good and Alex Pretti were not an accident, but rather the predictable result of a year of cruel and lawless immigration enforcement policy that has resulted in the illegal and unconstitutional searches, arrests, home invasions, detentions, deportations, and even deaths of Americans, undocumented immigrants, and immigrants with status and work authorization alike.”

– Raha Wala,
National Immigration Law Center

I just want to make a few points and then I'd be happy to answer any questions. First, it has been said many times today all people within the United States have constitutional rights irrespective of their immigration status. But importantly, when the basic rights are violated for non-citizens, they erode the rights of all Americans. The shocking, senseless murders of Renee Good and Alex Pretti were not an accident, but rather the predictable result of a year of cruel and lawless immigration enforcement policy that has resulted in the illegal and unconstitutional searches, arrests, home invasions, detentions, deportations, and even deaths of Americans, undocumented immigrants, and immigrants with status and work authorization alike.

Here during Operation Metro Surge, Minnesotans including US citizens have been stopped, arrested, and in some cases detained for hours or days based on little more than the color of their skin, the clothes they wear, the job they work in, the people they're hanging out with, the language they're speaking, or the accent they're speaking it in, or just for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. This papers please approach to immigration enforcement by stereotype reflects the national policy of racial profiling that played out in LA, Chicago, DC, and many other cities before it was supercharged here in the Twin Cities. Operation Metro Surge also showed that people are not safe even in their own homes. In January, federal agents brandished assault rifles instead of a warrant and used a battering ramp to break down the door of a Minneapolis home to arrest Garrison Gibson, a Liberian Minnesotan man who fled civil war as a refugee when he was a child and remains here lawfully. A whistleblower complaint alleges that ICE recruits are being trained to pursue warrantless home invasions as we speak in violation of the Fourth Amendment. A tactic that we saw on shocking display in Chicago last fall when federal agents claiming they were on a counterterrorism mission descended from a Blackhawk helicopter into an apartment complex, stormed in with flashbang grenades, and broke into people's homes in a military-style operation that resulted in the unlawful arrest and detention of dozens of men, women, and children, many of whom were US citizens.

Which brings me to my second point. The administration is offering false counterterrorism, foreign policy, and national security justifications to attempt to justify the unjustifiable and unlock war and emergency powers that are being used to disproportionately target black, brown, and indigenous people as well as other racial and ethnic minorities. It's no accident. I think it goes without saying, it's been said earlier today. It's no accident that ICE's surge to Minneapolis originated with a racist attack on the Minnesota Somali community that in many ways harkens back to President Trump's Muslim and African bans, which have been dramatically expanded to include 75 countries that have predominantly black, brown, Muslim, or Asian populations. The National Immigration Law Center and many of our friends have litigated these issues over

the years and we're continuing to fight this expanded ban in courts as well, and we have debunked the cynical smears against the Minnesota Somali community that continue to this day. It's also why we started the Democracy Defense Initiative to protect immigrant rights by defending democracy and defend our democracy by protecting immigrant rights. And that includes fighting back against the militarization of our immigration policy, which is why we sued to successfully block the deployment of the National Guard to police the people of Memphis.

The third point I want to make is the outrageous arrest and detention of 5-year-old Minnesotan Liam Conejo Ramos and is not a one-off. It's a reflection of a national policy that specifically and intentionally targets children and families in a cynical effort to promote self-deportation by imposing maximum suffering. That's why NILC has successfully prevented the administration from violating the due process rights of

unaccompanied Guatemalan children and deporting them overnight in the hundreds over Labor Day weekend. It's also why we've partnered with the National Education Association and many others to stand up a national campaign to protect the constitutional right of every child to a free public K-12 education irrespective of their immigration status.

One more depressing point and then a positive one I'm going to close on. Despite all these successes in courts, not just from the National Immigration Law Center, but also the many partners who have spoken today, we can't really expect the law, at least as it currently exists, on the books now, to fully protect our rights. What I didn't say about the national policy of racial profiling and immigration enforcement is that it was in fact blessed by the Supreme Court, and even where the law is clear, the administration is increasingly violating it in defiance of court orders. A federal judge right here in Minnesota

has documented hundreds of violations of court orders in operation metro surge which reflects a policy of disdain for our system of checks and balances coming from the seniormost levels of the department of justice, even the president himself. And here's the hopeful note that I close on. Minnesotans have proven that they will not let their rights be taken from them despite what the courts say, despite what the government says, and that they will put their own lives at risk to protect their communities. They ended Operation Metro Surge. I want to say that again. It wasn't the Trump administration that ended it. It was Minnesotans that ended Operation Metro Surge. They shut down DHS and Congress and they have forced a long overdue national reckoning on the militarization of immigration enforcement and domestic policing that has been threatening the very foundation of civil and human rights protections in the United States for decades. Thank you.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you, Raha. Daniel, we can go to you.

Daniel Hatoum, Senior Supervising Attorney, Beyond Border Program at the Texas Civil Rights Project – Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. These are the immortal words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speaking about the civil rights movement in the 1960s. But when we look to the immigrants rights landscape today, they're equally applicable. And that's why I'm here. My name is Daniel Hatoum and I'm an attorney from Texas working for the Texas Civil Rights Project. And it's because I'm a southern lawyer that I've seen the far-ranging effects that Metro Surge has had everywhere in this country. And so, I'm here today to testify about that interconnectedness that we have with our neighbors in the north. And I'm going to focus on two specific

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– Raha Wala,
National Immigration Law Center





Daniel Hatoum, Senior Supervising Attorney, Beyond Borders Program at the Texas Civil Rights Project, providing testimony.

points to do so. First, how civil rights violations that existed along the US Mexico border were exported from Texas to Minnesota. And second, how the civil rights violations that occurred in Minnesota ultimately became imported to Texas.

But first, I want to talk about the US Mexico border and what has been occurring along the US Mexico border for years. Specifically, within 100 miles of the US Mexico border, many courts have passed off on this idea that it is a constitutional light zone, that Customs and Border Protection officers of the Department of Homeland Security can search folks without a warrant. It shouldn't be lost on us now that the people who led Operation Metro Surge were folks who were trained along the US Mexico border. Greg Pavino is someone who was both a CBP officer and had his start in El Paso, Texas. And what we saw with them bringing these tactics to Minnesota. For example, very quickly into the beginning of the surge, we saw memorandums that were being published that said that CBP officers and ICE agents could enter people's homes without a warrant. And this is not just some esoteric legal discussion. This had real effects on real people. Mr. Tao is an individual who lives here in Minnesota and was seen early with his family one morning when armed agents entered his home without a judicial warrant. They pointed guns at his family and before he even had the opportunity to get dressed, they dragged him into the snow only to find out that he was a US citizen. When we allow constitutional violations and when we create a culture of impunity around searches such that there is no third-party warrant requirement, anyone can become a victim of these actions by CBP and ICE.

But it's not just searches, it's also excessive force. For decades, the Supreme Court has adopted something of a cottage industry of passing on excessive force conducted by CBP in the name of national security. And what we saw with Operation Metro Surge was them continuing the tactics that they had long used and the culture that had been created along the US Mexico border. Members of CBP were throwing flash grenades into crowds of people practicing their constitutional rights to protest. And it should not be lost on us that the individuals who swarmed and killed Alex Pretti were CBP agents.

But it's not just about how those civil rights violations were exported from Texas to Minnesota, but how ICE and CBP then exported the civil rights violations that they were committing here and sent them to Texas. During the first panel, one of the things that we heard was this idea that being sent to Texas was synonymous with being thrown in a cell with terrible conditions and detained for long periods of time. And during Operation Metro Surge, one of the things that I heard from lawyers who reached out to me was

“When we allow constitutional violations and when we create a culture of impunity around searches such that there is no third-party warrant requirement, anyone can become a victim of these actions by CBP and ICE.”

– Daniel Hatoum,
Texas Civil Rights Project

that they were essentially arresting folks in Minnesota and immediately putting them on a bus to Texas. And that was happening for two reasons. One, Texas has the largest amount of detention beds in the country. And two, Texas has one of the most conservative judicial apparatuses in the country. So, when people want to litigate their Habeas petitions, they’re going to be met with a much more difficult court of appeals in Texas than they would in Minnesota or in other states where the administration was arresting folks.

There are two detention facilities that I want to focus on where many people are being sent. The Dilley detention facility, the family detention facility, and Camp East Montana at Fort Bliss that I’ll refer to as Camp East.

We’ve already heard a lot about Dilley today. It was the

facility where Liam Conejo Ramos was sent. It’s because it’s a family detention facility — a type of facility that advocates refer to as baby jails because it’s surreal to walk into a private prison and hear an infant crying. And these facilities are famous for their awful conditions of confinement. Harvard University did a study in which they found that the provision of medical care in the Dilley facility was woefully inadequate. And in fact, during the first Trump administration, a child that was held in the Dilley facility ultimately passed as a result of the lack of medical care they received inside. And while Dilley is certainly notorious, notorious is an understatement when we’re referring to Camp East, Montana at Fort Bliss. Camp East is a former site of Japanese internment. When we look at the conditions in that facility, what we see is a lack of medical care being the rule, putrid food that causes widespread sickness, diarrhea, and vomiting, and excessive force where beatings are a common occurrence. In fact, there was a recent death at Camp East Montana at Fort Bliss, and the medical examiner that examined that death ruled that it was a homicide. Let me be clear about what that means. The medical examiner was saying that the guards at that facility strangled a man to death. Another death that also occurred within a month of that death was of an individual from Minnesota who we still don’t have answers on.

And because of the amount of enforcement and the amount of folks that were being sent to these detention facilities, it contributed to overcrowding, which led to other medical issues such as measles outbreaks in the facilities that threaten not just the facilities themselves, but the entire communities that they’re in and communities that they communicate with. Camp East Montana is in El Paso, a city of over 700,000 people with a busy airport and people flying all over the country every day. When we allow injustices to occur elsewhere, they end up in our communities and they harm our people, our neighbors. And I want to go back and end though with this thought of interconnectedness and what it means. It doesn’t just mean that the bad things that happen in one place go elsewhere. But it also means that when we stand up for our immediate neighbors, we help people all over the country. To point out a quote that one of our other co-panelists talked about... this idea that the ark of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice, but only if we’re willing to bend it. When the folks of Minnesota stood up and they forced Operation Metro Surge to end by standing hand in hand with their neighbors, they provided a blueprint to all of us to stand up for our neighbors so that we can help people in all parts suffering injustice. The only thing left for us to do is to follow it. Thank you.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you guys so much. I’m really touched by everything that you’ve said here today and it kind of brings it full circle of what we’ve been hearing from earlier panels and what we’re going to pivot to and hear directly from impacted folks. But I don’t have a ton of questions. I don’t know if there’s any last comments that you all have, but I think my main takeaways from this panel is supporting habeas corpus, right, which is a process for getting somebody out of detention, and that process also depends on where you’re located. So, what state you’re in and what kind of judge you pull, and that all of this is interconnected. Those are the main takeaways that I have is that what happens in Minnesota is really happening to all of us across this country. So, thank you for being here. Thank you for sharing your comments and I look forward to hearing more from you as we move forward. We’re going to take a quick break, have some lunch, and then, reconvene, at three.



Testifying from left to right: Khathong Sinwonga, sister of a directly impacted individual; Gloria Contreras Edin, Owner & Founder, Contreras Edin Law; Raymond A., educator; and Adrienne Diercks, Founder and Executive Director, Project Success.

PANEL 3

Impacted Individuals and Families

Rochelle Garza – All right. So, we're going to go ahead and begin our next panel. Thank you all so much for being here. Again, this is the People's Hearing on Immigration Enforcement. We've been brought together by national organizations to hear directly from you all, right? To learn about what happened and what is continuing to happen in Minnesota to make a public record. I'm Rochelle Garza. I'm the Chair of the United States Commission on Civil Rights. I'm not here in my official capacity and I'm not conducting this as a hearing as part of the commission, but I have been asked to run this hearing. This portion of the hearing is going to center on the voices of individuals and families who have experienced the effects of immigration enforcement in Minneapolis. These testimonies are going to help provide a clearer picture of how policies and enforcement practices affect daily life for the members of your community. Each panelist is going to have about 5 to 7 minutes. So, please be mindful of your time and we're going to go ahead and start. I'll list who is going to be speaking. We have Ben Berkman representing the Good family. He's their legal counsel and representative from Romanucci & Blandin LLC. Adrienne Diercks — founder and Executive Director of Project Success. Gloria Contreras Edin — founder of Contreras Edin Law and Chong Lee Scott Tao who is an impacted individual and Ray A. who is here with us today. But we're going to go ahead and start with Ben if you would kick us off.

Ben Berkman, *Good Family Legal Counsel Representative, Romanucci & Blandin, LLC* – Sounds good. Thank you. Hello everyone, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Ben Berkman. I'm a civil rights attorney at the law firm of Romanucci & Blandin. And I have the deep honor of representing the family of Renee Good. My colleagues and I are deeply distressed at the incursions on fellow American civil rights by our own government. The occupation of cities by ICE and CBP has strayed far beyond their straight admission to go after the worst of the worst, leading to unnecessary provocation that has struck fear in our communities and caused

Ben Berkman
*Good Family Legal
 Counsel Representative,
 Romanucci & Blandin,
 LLC*



immense pain and suffering. What happened to Renee, what happened to Alex Pretti, what happened to Marimar Martinez and countless others is intolerable in a civilized society and has led to a collective cry not just for backwards looking justice and accountability, but also for this to stop.

But before I talk about accountability and what that looks like, I want to stop to talk a little bit about Renee. I never knew Renee, but I learned a lot about her from the people who knew her the best. I learned Renee is a mother who loved her three children. She served on the board at her youngest son's school. and she had just dropped him off there on the morning of January 7th. Renee was the glue of her family. She was totally and completely selfless with her time. She was someone who if you got a new opportunity or something good happened to you, she would be more excited for you than you would be for yourself. She would spend her time and her money to ensure that she got to see her entire extended family, her parents, her siblings, her nieces and nephews. Even when time and money were hard to come by for Renee, she would take 12-hour road trips to make sure that everyone could be together. She radiated joy and just cared so deeply about other people.

I wanted to describe Renee as she's been described by the people who knew her best in part to help people understand who she was outside of one really horrifying news reel, but also to counter the absurd and false statements immediately made about her by those in the highest rungs of power. The notion that Renee was a quote unquote domestic terrorist is so blatantly false and just so far from who she was as a person. We need an end to the violations of rights on part of ICE and CBP and the federal government, but we also need an end to the false narratives and cover stories by federal officials about the victims of ICE and CBP misuses of power and excessive force. In America, our leaders have to be held to a standard of responsible speech and truth, and I'd like to talk about the truth. And I'd like to talk about the need for transparency. In Renee's case, the federal government immediately declared that there would be no investigation into her killer's actions. And it's currently unclear if any federal criminal investigation is ongoing into Jonathan Ross's conduct on January 7th. Without an unbiased and thorough investigation, the criminal justice path to accountability for Renee's death may never materialize. But transparency also requires that the government is honest about what the law requires.

So, I want to be clear about one thing. No matter what those in power say, there is no absolute criminal immunity for immigration enforcement agents. While this administration may choose not to prosecute bad actors, that does not mean that the next administration will take the same position. Instructing agents that they have absolute immunity is not only false, it creates a false perception that leads agents to behave as though they'll suffer no consequences for violating the rights of others. And there frankly could not be a more dangerous message to send armed agents wielding the power of the state.

But today I want to draw your attention to not just criminal remedies for constitutional violations but also civil remedies. In the face of the federal government and other investigative bodies failing to act, those whose rights are violated by federal authorities must turn to the civil justice system for accountability. Unfortunately, in the civil justice system, the deck is stacked against accountability for federal officers. Under a law passed in 1871 called 42 USC section 1983, the United States allows for individuals to pursue civil justice with a lawsuit against a city, county, or state for the conduct of its officers and against officers individually. However, similar legal action against federal enforcement officers like ICE and Border Patrol agents is currently not authorized under section 1983. Now, there used to be a time when someone who was victimized by a federal law enforcement officer could sue that officer directly for violating the Constitution. But the Supreme Court has whittled that cause of action down to the point that it is almost non-existent, and overall, there are very few ways to pursue civil accountability against a federal agent who violates your rights. Now, victims have some possible path to a measure of accountability under the Federal Tort Claims Act or the FTCA. And in an FTCA case, you're not suing the federal agent or officer who violated your rights. You're suing the United States, and even then, suing under the FTCA is challenging. It requires you to first complete a form that tells the government agency that violated your rights that you're going to pursue a claim against them. And then you have to wait up to six months for that agency to respond to you. And then even when you get to the doorsteps of the courthouse and you file your civil case; the FTCA has a broad exception to liability for so-called discretionary functions. The FTCA does not allow for cases against individual officers who have violated your rights and you are deprived of your right to a trial by jury of your peers. Put differently, the government has decided that the seventh amendment right to a jury trial does not apply when you are suing the government. Victims of constitutional violations should not have to require the permission of the federal government to sue the federal government and its agents for cases like Renee's or Alex Pretti's or Marimar Martinez'. If the government must give victims permission to seek accountability for violation of their constitutional rights, then their rights are just words on a paper. Rights are not rights without remedies.

“Instructing agents that they have absolute immunity is not only false, it creates a false perception that leads agents to behave as though they’ll suffer no consequences for violating the rights of others. And there frankly could not be a more dangerous message to send armed agents wielding the power of the state.”

– Ben Berkman, Good Family Legal Counsel Representative, Romanucci & Blandin, LLC

This problem requires legislative solutions. At the state level, Minnesota and other states can pass bills as some states have, making it a state law tort or a state law violation to violate the federal constitution, which would thereby directly enable lawsuits against federal officers. And perhaps most importantly, Congress can amend section 1983 to add four words or the United States so that federal officers, in addition to state and local officers, can be sued civilly if their conduct merits it. The current path to holding federal officers accountable is a narrow and uphill climb. That's not going to deter us in the slightest from pursuing justice for Renee and for our other clients. But the system can and must change to ensure that our constitutional guarantees are not just words on paper. I thank you for your time.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you, Ben, for your testimony and for representing the Good family. I'm very touched that you made the time. I know that you have other engagements to go to, but I just kind of... you touched on how difficult it is to sue the federal government and hold accountability. I imagine it's different from district to district, right? So, I'm a Texan and I know how difficult it is to have those kinds of cases in the fifth circuit, and I think you gave us a nice roadmap for what could be done at the state level to protect people's rights or at least open the door a little bit more. Do you have any other thoughts on that? Is there anything else that you would like to uplift that Renee's situation brings to light for folks to keep in mind?

Ben Berkman – So on the state level, I'll expand a little bit on the sort of legislative change that I suggested which is that under, you know, federal law currently authorizes you to sue state and local officials for violating

the constitution, but there's also a federal law called the Westfall Act that immunizes federal employees from liability generally. But there's an exception to the Westfall Act for lawsuits alleging violations of the Constitution. The problem is there's no vehicle to pursue lawsuits for violations of the constitution against federal employees like ICE officers and CBP agents. So, one option is for states to create that vehicle that would fit within the exception to the Westfall Act for constitutional violations. And there's at least a good deal of scholarly support and judicial support for the proposition that if a state does that, if a state creates its own section 1983 that would apply to federal actors and enable them to, you know, enable people to sue when their constitutional rights are violated under state law that that would fall into the immunity exception under the Westfall Act and enable those lawsuits to proceed. So that's the primary way that we think state legislators can act given that you know Congress may or may not act on an amendment to section 1983, but there's likely a lot more appetite in certain states for seeking accountability and justice.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you. Thank you so much for expounding on that. I think that's really helpful for us to keep in mind. Well, thank you. Thank you for your time, Ben. I appreciate your your testimony here today.

Ben Berkman – Of course. Thank you for having me.

Rochelle Garza – We're going to go ahead and move to the sister of Chong Lee Scott Tao to testify.

Khathong Sinwongsa, Sister of a directly impacted individual – Hi. Thanks for being here today. My name is Khathong Sinwongsa. I'm the older sister of Chong Lee Scott Tao. My brother Chong is actually adopted. My mom was recruited by the American military to treat the wounded soldier in the Vietnam war — in the secret war and he was left at the hospital where she worked. So she took him home because nobody wants him. So that's how his story started. He's a US citizen. He came to the United States in April 1976. He has never committed a crime. He's never had any interaction with the law. He's quiet. He is actually a shy person. He was never diagnosed with a disability, but I've always known he's a vulnerable person. He's slow to respond, slow to engage and he shields his vulnerability by he likes to laugh every time he shields it he likes to laugh and with delay reaction as well. On January 18th, 2026, on a freezing winter day, below zero actually, my brother's home was broken into by masked ICE agents. At that time there was heavy ICE agents around the neighborhood, so they were scared to go out so they didn't go out. He lives with his son and sister-in-law and has a grandson. So my nephew is the only one that goes out and has a job, goes work and then comes home. So then at that time my brother... the ICE agent... there was a knock on the door. So then they were scared so they didn't open the door.



And next thing they know, the ICE agent broke into their home, went in there and shouted at them and screamed at them and then pointed a gun. Literally point a gun at their faces and then look for somebody's

name that they don't even know. They don't even know the person. So they went into every room and then when they finally got into my brother's room, he just finished taking a shower. So, he's in his boxer underwear sitting on his bed and they just came in and grabbed him. He shared with me that they did ask him for his ID but they didn't even give him a chance to even look for it. They cuffed him, dragged him out, and he put his crocs on but then they didn't allow him to put anything on and the blanket was actually up by the door. So they just grabbed that and then pulled it over him, but he already locked his hands behind his back. They just dragged him out like that, and the family was scared. They didn't know what's going on. They were confused. They were terrified. So they didn't know what to say. He just went with them because he

“(An) ICE agent broke into their home, went in there...screamed at them and then pointed a gun.”
 – Khathong Sinwongsa, Sister of a directly impacted individual

didn't say anything. He didn't know what to say. He shared with me that they drove him around actually to Minneapolis and back. They took him to this kind of empty commercial building and he was really scared. He thought they were going to kill him. They asked him to get out of the car and then they took a picture of him and then they went inside to the car and looked him up supposedly and then found out that he wasn't the man that they were looking for. So they dropped him up at home. He told me that if he had clothes on, they were probably just going to leave him there, but because he didn't have any clothes on and it was really cold — then they dropped him off. The next day I heard about it through my family. So then I went to visit him because he lived here with me and there was still heavy ICE agent. There are a lot of reporters out there and they kept knocking at the door... the reporter and I wasn't even the one being terrorized and I was scared. I felt traumatized. I jump every time there's a knock at the door. So then I told my brother that it is not good for him to stay there. So, I took him home with me. He just stayed with me until everything calmed down. And during that time, my mom just passed away after Christmas. So, we were planning my mom's funeral. So, then I told my brother that we plan to do her funeral in California. So, then I bought a ticket for him to go to California because it's not safe. He said he's scared. He didn't want to go back to the house. as of yet. So, he's still down there right now. He hasn't come back yet. And since my brother's living in fear and his family live in fear, believe it or not, I can't believe that I am living in fear of that incident, and every knock on the door, even my own door, I jump.

“They took him to this kind of empty commercial building and he was really scared. He thought they were going to kill him...and then (they) found out that he wasn't the man they were looking for.”

– Khathong Sinwongsa, Sister of a directly impacted individual

My family cannot believe this is happening to my brother and to so many other people. And we're scared. We remain scared. And this is why I'm speaking out today. We are grateful to all those that captured my brother's experience on video. We're grateful for those who reach out that wanted to help us and support us. We are grateful for the commission who is going to share our story and document this inhumane and unjust actions of the federal government — invading and arresting and detaining my brother and many others. And my brother is not here today, but he's coming back home mid-March and he's going to come stay with me. I told him that until he's ready to go back to his house. My mother actually played a role in the Vietnam war, the secret war, and she served helping the save or treat the wounded soldiers. And if she would have been alive, she would have been devastated to hear this is happening to my brother who I felt that she loved the most actually because of he was orphaned, and I ask you please hold the federal government accountable for the violence that they have caused across the country and to many many families that are going through this right now and I'm actually thankful that my brother is still alive but I'm saddened to see that other people lost their lives for this unjust actions of the federal government. Thank you. Thank you.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you so much for your testimony, for being here today, and for sharing. Thank you. We're going to go to Adrienne if you would.

Adrienne Diercks, *Founder and Executive Director, Project Success* – Thank you. Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Luis and Jose and the Miranda family and CLUES and everyone here for every story that's been shared today. I'm honored to be here with all of you and with you, Ray. My name is Adrienne Diercks and I went all through the Minneapolis public schools. I founded an organization called Project Success in 1994. The mission has not changed, which is to inspire young people to dream about their future, help them take steps to get there, and give them experiences of excellence for all students that will give them the tools that will take them through the rest of their lives. We just turned 32 years old, 225,000 students and their families. When Luis and Jose called about this hearing, which is so critical to record the stories, I reached out to students, families, leaders, people that I know, work closely with. And everyone knew how important it was. and many of our students

Adrienne Diercks
Founder and Executive Director, Project Success



and a mother in particular who wanted to do it come here with her son called me back and said I want to do this, this is critical this isn't over it, it won't be over but in this moment it's not safe and we must make sure that I can take care of my family and do the work I need to do but we will write it down and we will hold people accountable. So that will happen.

I wanted to share a few stories. When asked to speak here today, I thought about small moments which are very large moments that I've seen over the last 32 years in the impact of hateful language, violence, fear. We hear about and see today the large and devastating impacts. And I want to share just a few stories of 24 hours after Renee Good was killed. That same day, they continued, that was around 8:00 a.m. They continued to show up at the schools we're in. Again, we work with every Minneapolis 6th through 12th grader. So, every student in every school, our teams are in all of the schools. So, the moment that that happened, school was closed for the next two days in Minneapolis. No notice and a majority of our students were then moved by Friday to remote learning because they weren't safe. At that moment, it was said that it would be through February. It's now through the end of April. Knowing our team, knowing the impact of COVID being home for 18 months within months, the murder of George Floyd within these blocks and on these same families several things happened. So, we had one immediately... we looked at what was planned

“In the months ahead, we can never forget the love, the care, the support, the opportunities they (our young people) will need to create the future they want after going through all of this.”

– Adrienne Diercks, Project Success

for the next couple days knowing that with no notice they would be home. First thing was we had an MLK STEM justice field trip for 400 students and immediately the partners, the schools, the principles, should we go, we knew students needed to go. And immediately, I won't quote who it was, said, “Oh, we're freaking going and we're bringing all 400 students.” And we're going to have buses that are safe and escorts and security and people trained in dealing with ICE agents as much as they can. We're going to have escorts. And we did this field trip within days of Renee Good's killing. One of the reasons I share this story is the faces of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, some who were picked up at their homes who said, “I must go. I want to learn”, and the faces of all the students coming in that day demanding that they get to do the activities.

The same day we got a call from a family we know from a mother who lives off Lake Street who said, “Uh, I was just thrown down the stairs by an ICE agent. I have four kids on my own. I need to go to work, but we've been evicted. And she said, one of the things she kept saying is, we need help. We need to make sure we

have enough bins to make sure we can move safely. Within those hours, within 24 hours, we worked to get her a new home with her family. What struck me was the pictures that were sent by the hour on everyone that came together to help them, that she was able. She said, "I must go to work." The students said, "But I can't miss school." And everything they did in 24 hours with no notice to be in a new home. And hours after that, the thing that struck me the most was all of the students that sent pictures who said, "Now we can go to school. We can get there safely from this new place. It sounds like a small thing." Seeing their eyes and their faces and how much they wanted to learn and the impact. We also had a musical rehearsal. We use arts and ninety students were supposed to rehearse that day for a play that opens this weekend with ninety students in one of your partner schools, Ray. And again, it might sound small, but our team that manages this and was going to do this rehearsal this day, as we spoke about whether we would keep it and the students saying, "But we have to rehearse." One of the team members said, "Here's the deal. I can be killed today on the street and the person that kills me can go home and have dinner." So what you're asking is, do I risk my life? Do we do the rehearsal? And she looked down and she said, "I know how much they needed it four years ago. I know how much they need it today." And again, it may sound small, Adrienne, but we're going to do it. And they did it. Some students rehearsed at home. And again, I say this because of the impact on many of the organizations here, our team members, people said today, I will risk my own life to make sure that we're serving others. And it's critical. And that's what we've done and shown up in Minnesota. But I'll say with the musical opening this weekend, I had a parent call me. Again, I'm sharing just the things I've seen and heard today. and he called me in tears and said, "This is saving my child's life because having hope, being inspired as an 11-year-old... is life."

And the last thing I'll say is that we had a huge field trip as well planned for 60 girls to plan and work on their future. Two days after Renee Good was killed, school was closed. The counselor and the principal said, "I'm pretty sure we're going to need to cancel." And we started to put that into motion. We said, "We will do rides. We will do escorts. Anything it takes to happen." And they started to put that into motion. And about two hours later that evening, they said, "Well, we met with all of the girls and they said, "We will not be deterred from working on our bright futures." And the reason I share these stories is that when I thought of the impact and someone said today, I'm honored to be a part of this sermon. I thought about the hearts, the eyes of young people from 11 to 18 years old who are so resilient and determined in the face of fear. And I know what I want to say today is, in the months ahead, we can never forget the love, the care, the support, the opportunities they (our young people) will need to create the future they want after going through all of this.. And I will say as one student said to me, we demand the futures that we are owed. So thank you for letting me speak today.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you, Adrienne. We're gonna go to Ray.

Ray A., Educator – Hello. How are you?

Rochelle Garza – Doing okay. How are you?

Ray A. – I'm good, thank you. I just want to thank you for the opportunity to come here today. I've been working with Adrienne for many years and she called me this weekend and talked to me a little about what we're doing here today and I was really nervous to come here today and I'm still nervous. So, I apologize if I'm a little scattered because you know once I'll tell you why in a little while, but I'm always fearful for the people that I work with. So, what I'm going to do today is testify and so I'm going to tell you a little bit about my story, who I am, and maybe a little bit about what I do, the impact it has on my work, and then I want to share some stories from my students. All right. So, my name is Ray and I came to the United States a long time ago. From running barefoot in the hills of my island to a small community here in the Midwest. And the reason why my family did so well, I think, was because the community really reached out and made sure that we had coats and hats and gloves and had an opportunity to be successful in that community. So that's my story.



Ray A.
Educator

The day that Renee was shot, it was about 11:00. I was outside with my students, and I'm looking up and I'm like, man, that helicopter, it's not the same sound that helicopter... because we're not that far away. It was one of those kinds of tactical helicopters. You can hear the duck, duck, you know, because I was here also when George Floyd was killed and I know the sound. So, I'm thinking to myself, what's going on down there? And then my phone starts blowing up, right? Like, you know, there's something going on. And we

have these systems in place for education that we do here in Minneapolis. And I'm really not going to share the name of my school because in fear of hate mail, which we get weekly around, you know, black and brown kids. So, I don't really want to share the school name, but I'm on recess duty, right? Because that's what I do as the principal is make sure the kids are safe. So, looking around, looking around and we all kind of go in and by the end of the day, just like Adrienne said, we got a notice that there's no school. You know, we in the community every, you know, I live in Minneapolis and we start learning about what's going on. We're sad. The school that I work at has 400 to 500 immigrant students and overnight they're gone. Just gone, and how it kind of impacted my work.

How it impacted my work... We immediately started to restructure how we teach children. We were trying to figure out where students were at and get them devices and computers and ways to connect with them. It was really super difficult

because our families were not you know, they were shy and wanting to be isolated I think and didn't know who to trust. We started to redeploy our resources within the school to make sure that our students got to school safe or the ones that did come to be safe and many of them decided that you know it's better for them to be at home and just the whole idea of trying to teach students live and on... in terms of virtual is extremely difficult. The teachers were super sad and didn't know what to do and it took us about a week really to kind of come to grips with what was going on in the community and what was going on with our students, and we continued to do our best every day to connect with our students. I would go around each classroom. I have quite a few classrooms, but over several days I would go into the Google meets and then, you know, tell them that you know, te extraño — I miss you, you know, and let them know that they're loved and wanted and that we're with them. So that's the message that we were trying to send out. For us, it was about keeping our students safe and keeping them fed and getting them the information that they needed. So it really wasn't around, you know, trying to educate them anymore. It was trying to let them know that they're valued and that they're wonderful people and that you know we care for them. So it was really and still is a dilemma.

Our students are trickling back. I bet we have half of our students back. We still probably have around 200 students that are still online and afraid. And I'm talking about, you know, Latino students, Afghan students, East African students, students from all over the world, who are still not feeling comfortable coming to school. So, it's, it's been stressful for our teachers and for myself, who are, you know, just trying to do a good job with them and let them know that we're still, you know, we're still here for them so that's something that's kind of has impacted my work is really around that being the emotional leader around our teachers and our students and it's exhausting. It's exhausting, but there's a bright story to this before I share some stories. I'm not going to read the stories. I'll just read what the teacher wrote for me, but I have 30 stories here I want to submit to you. You all can do what you need to do with them.

But there's a bright side to this, too. I've never ever seen a community come together like we have come together in Minneapolis. We have... the weeks after we've had patrols on every corner with whistles ready to go. We've had informal groups getting together and making sure our students or the parents get transported to work and back. We've had even now last Thursday night 150 boxes of food delivered, and they get a menu and so they get to check you know you need toilet paper. Yeah, got it. You know, deodorant. Okay, got it. So, we have and then that's the community getting the list of everything that the students or that the families need and then we put it together and then we make sure it gets out. So, the bright side is

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– Ray A., Educator

I think that we're kind of looking at each other in the eye a little bit more, you know, like how are you, you know? So that's been really a bright side to this tragedy that's happened.

But in terms of our students, they're still in hiding. They're not learning. I shared my story. I think that it made me a stronger person. I've had the opportunity to lead thousands of students and teachers over my years in the district I work at. And so, I know the impact of a positive community. So the community is still there. We're still strong there. And that's the piece that I wanted to make sure that you knew. Okay, but I have 30 letters that our students wrote en español, but you know but in general this is what they said that they don't hate ICE. They just want people like ICE and other folks to understand that they're human, that they're human and that they're isolated and that they're ready to come back when we're ready. So, here's what the teacher wrote and then I'll submit those to you. Okay. It says thank you for documenting and caring about the experiences of students. Thank you for fighting for all to be safe, feel loved, valued, and be seen and honored in this country. I am honored to continue to learn from and know my students each day. and I hope that their stories and perspectives travel widely and help us all be better. So that's what the teacher wrote and here's their stories right here. So I'd like to give those to you.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you. Thank you so much.

Ray A. – Yeah. So anyway, I go to school every day and try to make it real positive and our kids are trickling in and once they all are back, we're going to party just for about just for about an hour and a half. So, thank you.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you. Thank you. Gloria, we can turn to you.

Gloria Contreras Edin, Owner & Founder, Contreras Edin Law – Thank you. Yeah. Good afternoon, everyone and good afternoon Chair Garza. Thank you for listening today. My name is Gloria Contreras Edin and I'm an immigration lawyer. I've been a lawyer for over 20 years and I practice primarily family-based immigration law removal defense and I have filed many many habeas corpus petitions unfortunately over the last 60 days. Now, over the years, I have represented mothers, fathers, children, grandparents trying to navigate our immigration system. I've sat with many loved ones who have disappeared into detention. I have filed emergency habeas petitions in the middle of the night when the government has detained someone without due process, without fairness, and sometimes even without basic care for their humanity. Now, what I'm sharing is not an abstract, but what happens to people after they're detained. It's what happens to women



and to families. Once a person is detained, everything changes for them immediately.

“During Operation Metro Surge, individuals were processed in the middle of the night. Quite literally, people were picked up at 9 or 10 at night, swept up somewhere, taken somewhere, and then found in Texas the following morning.”

– Gloria Contreras Edin,
Contreras Edin Law

Now, in Minnesota, when a person is detained, they are generally taken to the Henry Whipple Federal building at Fort Snelling in Minnesota. There they are questioned by ICE agents. They are processed. They're issued an I213 and a notice to appear. Then they are placed into a system that moves very quickly for them. That is what happens generally. During Operation Metro Surge, that is not what happened. During Operation Metro Surge, individuals were processed in the middle of the night. Quite literally, people were picked up at 9 or 10 at night, swept up somewhere, taken somewhere, and then found in Texas the following morning. Hence, petitions filed at 2:30 in the morning. Once they're transferred, they can disappear in every practical sense. ICE did not timely update their portals to locate them.

Their spouses and children did not know how to contact them. Attorneys like me struggled to track them. They missed work. They lost income. Bills went unpaid. Their childcare was interrupted. Medical care was interrupted, and nursing infants lost access to their mothers. Families went into crisis in a matter of hours.

I want to tell you the story of how this happened to one of my clients who is here with me today. Her name is Antonia Aguilar Maldonado. Would you please raise your hand? Last year, Antonia and her husband were both detained in the morning while on their way to work. In a single moment, both parents were taken from their two small children. They were left in the care of friends and relatives. Antonia remained detained for almost 30 days. Her husband was subsequently deported. Antonia was detained with no provocation, no criminal history. She had already been in removal proceedings. She had applied for work authorization. She had a social security number. She was doing everything right, and she was simply waiting her turn to tell her own story about why she entered the United States at the age of 17 as an unaccompanied minor. Antonio's youngest child was still nursing when she was detained and while in detention, she was unable to properly pump her breast milk. The jail was unprepared for her physical needs and had to go and purchase a manual breast pump. At some point, she was unable to effectively pump her milk that it started turning green. I want to stop and have you think about that for a moment. Think about Antonia's physical pain, the fear, the humiliation, and the grief that she and hundreds of other mothers who are separated from their nursing babies face when they sit in a detention facility wondering what is happening to their babies. Antonia is not alone. Today I represent another woman who was out in El Paso, Texas. She is the mother of two small US citizen children just like Antonia. She

did everything right, filed her application for asylum, had work authorization. She's been separated from her 11-month-old baby who was nursing for two months. The baby is not thriving, and a father is left alone with an inconsolable baby. I have represented women who are pregnant while in detention without any criminal history.

The harm that my clients are facing is not theoretical. It is documented. In one recent report from January 20th, 2025, through January 12th, 2026, the report issued by Senator Jon Ossoff of Georgia reported that there were over a thousand credible reports of human rights abuses in immigration detention. Those reports included 44 credible reports of family separation, including mothers reportedly separated from the breastfeeding infants and in one case for several months. Antonia is released, thank goodness, through a habeas petition, and I'm working hard to get my other client released. But even when someone is fortunate enough to be released, the hardship does not stop there. Many individuals like Antonia are released

without any of their personal effects that they brought in with them. In Antonia's case, she still doesn't have her passport, her employment authorization document, her social security card, her driver's license was taken away. They have not been returned. So even after release, she was left unable to return to work, unable to drive, unable to support her family in the most basic way. Since her detention, Antonia has lost her job. She was evicted from her home, and she's lost all her income. Antonia needs help.

A 2021 ICE directive states that pregnant, postpartum, and nursing individuals generally should not be detained unless extraordinary circumstances exist. The policy exists because the government understands that these individuals are medically vulnerable. And yet too often what I see in practice is that those protections have been ignored and they are treated as optional. But I'll tell you that it is not optional when a baby needs to nurse. It is not optional when a pregnant woman needs prenatal care. And it is not optional when a mother is in pain and a child is struggling to survive without her. Immigration detention in the United States is a civil detention. It's not supposed to be a punishment. The law is clear that the detention is meant to ensure appearances in court or to protect public safety. And yet in practice, many people I represent, mothers, asylum seekers, and longtime community members are detained even though they pose no danger

“I represent people in this system every single day...I have seen their courage. I have seen their dignity. I have seen the terrible cost that detention imposes on them and on the people who they love. And I'm asking that all of us see them clearly, not as case numbers, not as files, not as problems to be processed, but as human beings whose lives, health, children, and futures matter.”

– Gloria Contreras Edin,
Contreras Edin Law

to the community and have every incentive to appear in court. I represent people in this system every single day. I'm in court almost every single day. I was there this morning. I have seen their courage. I have seen their dignity. I have seen the terrible cost that detention imposes on them and on the people who they love. And I'm asking that all of us see them clearly, not as case numbers, not as files, not as problems to be processed, but as human beings whose lives, health, children, and futures matter. Thank you.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you each for coming here and sharing your story and talking about your clients, talking about your students and talking about your brother. That's bravery, right? Telling the truth about what happened and naming who the real victims are, right? That's all of us. I'm particularly touched. I mean, I have very young kids, so I just finished my nursing journey with my youngest, so I know how critical that bonding time is, and what has been done is just atrocious, and I understand. We have a lot of folks that have come here today to share their stories. So, we're going to have to move forward. If the audience can just please remain seated, please. We're going to get the next set of panelists. Unfortunately, we're running like an hour behind, so we're trying to make up time. Thank you. Thank you.



Testifying from left to right: Violeta Hernandez, Director of Early Childhood Initiatives & Program Policy, CLUES; Mary Hernandez, Executive Director, Mi CASA; Francisco Segovia, Executive Director, COPAL; Dr. Habon Abdulle, Executive Director and Founder, Ayada Leads; HwaJeong Kim, Council Vice President, Saint Paul City Council, and Executive Director, Minnesota Voice; and John Pacheco Jr., President & Founder, Latino Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota.

Impacted Individuals and Families, part 2

Rochelle Garza – All right, everyone. We'll go ahead and get started. This panel continues the conversation around the impact on immigration enforcement on community members directly from those impacted, those speaking on those impacted. The courage it requires to speak publicly about these experiences should not be taken lightly. So I thank each and every one of you for being here and to all the folks that are watching you know thank you for bearing witness to this as well. Your testimony today helps ensure that these experiences are documented as part of a broader civil rights record. So, the panelists that we have before us are Violeta Hernandez, Director of Early Childhood Initiatives and Program Policy at CLUES. We have Mary Hernandez, the Executive Director of Mi Casa. Francisco Segovia, Executive Director of COPAL. We have Dr. Habon Abdulle, Executive Director of Ayada Leads. We have HwaJeong Kim, Council Vice President of St. Paul City Council and Executive Director of Minnesota Voice. Then finally, we have John Pacheco Jr., President and founder of the Latino Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota. So, we can go ahead and start with Violeta if you want to kick us off and five to seven minutes each panelist if you would do us a favor on that.

Violeta Hernandez, *Director of Early Childhood Initiatives and Program Policy, CLUES (Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio)* – Gracias Chair Garza for the opportunity. Buenas tardes a todos. Thank you for the opportunity to amplify the voice of the community in front of you today. My name is Violeta Hernandez Espinosa and I am Director of Early Childhood Initiatives and Program Policy at CLUES, where you are. Thank you. Welcome. However, I wear many hats in our community. Before sharing some of the impacts of Operation Metro Surge on families and children from our vantage point, I'd like to briefly share that in my second shift, I have been co-building a family business with my brother since 2018, which has grown to 11 shops in the metro and greater Minnesota areas, and was named business of the year last year by the Latino Chamber of Commerce, who you'll hear from later. We got to the point of considering bankruptcy due to the loss of sales of up to 60% in the last three years. I'd also like to share that when I'm not working with CLUES or with community through CLUES in my third shift, I've been involved in various rapid response initiatives including indigenous roots Operación Vuelo Sagrado and currently working to build a statewide network of rapid responders and mobilizing small business owners towards legislative action. I also serve on the board of the Center for Victims of Torture, a multinational organization that has turned its focus more towards home here in Minnesota.



My sister and my niece are both teachers. One in Eden Prairie Schools, a suburban school, and another in urban-based Richfield public schools. Both witnessed significant drops in enrollment. The drastic drop in enrollment impacting them to the point of tears, worried for their students and their families. Teachers are some of the strongest human beings, but this is what is happening to them. Imagine as they try to

re-engage with students who are coming back to in-person schooling. Imagine having to regulate and explain to your remaining students why their classmates are not in class and gone overnight or seeing parents being arrested in apartment buildings next to schools and then returning home to their own young children.

“I want to make sure that as we walk away from here and from this space that we know it’s not over. The cameras and violence may have slowed, and our political representatives may be speaking in ways that imply that this operation is coming to an end. But to those of us who are closer to work, we know sadly it is not. Many of us know that we truly are in a false spring on this operation.”

Violeta Hernandez, CLUES

I share this background to say that I'm still eyes and ears on the ground like many of us in rapid response networks and who are a part of an impacted community. And I want to make sure that as we walk away from here and from this space that we know it's not over. The cameras and violence may have slowed, and our political representatives may be speaking in ways that imply that this operation is coming to an end. But to those of us who are closer to work, we know sadly it is not. Many of us know that

we truly are in a false spring on this operation. For those who are from out of state, that is what Minnesotans call this time of year when we get a few days of really nice weather — followed by snow. In my 30 years living in Minnesota as an immigrant and my 20 years serving the nonprofit and public sectors, I have not seen anything like what we are living. So, my hope is that we will all be focusing next on scenario planning.

Now there is no doubt that those most impacted by this attack on our communities have been and will continue to be the children. Our Early Childhood Initiatives Department serves childcare providers and indirectly the families they serve. Our community networks, programs and trainings reach up to 600 childcare providers. The initial effect of the operation was the drop in enrollment in childcare spaces as families did not want to or could not leave their homes to safely bring their children to their care spaces. While many did want their children to continue in care and education as they saw the developmental impact on their children, they did not feel safe driving the children and eventually funds became short. Many providers were and are providing services even when parents are owing them months of unpaid enrollment due to loss of jobs and savings. They want to help parents. But the result, especially with

family childcare providers, is that they are now struggling to stay open due to income losses. We have some providers who have decided to close their doors, and some are returning to their home countries as the fear and insecurity is too much for them. We see their posts on our WhatsApp groups selling their items for their childcare spaces. We had one provider who had to pause her operation to shelter in her home which was ultimately highly targeted as her family lives in a trailer home. This provider ultimately had to leave the state for over a month to help their eight-year-old child reenter as she was having panic attacks with behaviors that would worry any parent. There was a parent who was arrested on the way to one of our network providers' family childcare spaces while the children were already strapped in the car seat. This was a family who was already struggling to pay the provider. After this, the family was left without a dad, traumatized, looking for help to survive with basic needs and the provider even more stressed. Other parents had been taken before this case.

We also have to remember that most of our staff at CLUES are a part of one of the most impacted communities by this federal operation, which has added stress to our own operation. CLUES launched a family childcare business incubator last fall with all four of our providers getting licensed and operating since January of this year. But the businesses have been impacted by low enrollment. We think this is largely due to what we are living as a state. Our family services team which focuses more on parent education and services has also continued their regular home visit program but with a highly new and stressful context. At times staff fear for their own safety as they go visit families. They share that pregnant moms have stopped going to their prenatal appointments due to the fear of being detained. December 5th, that's the date one of these families went into isolation and hasn't come out yet. Their staff is also now delivering boxes of food and other needs in their visits. In fact, beyond our role expectations, many of us are delivering food boxes to homes and directing referrals and questions on basic needs from our community.

We are still facing a 300 family wait list for rent support. And our Canasta program continues to be pushed beyond capacity. In our department, much of our programming moved to virtual modes as the systems still have requirements to maintain licensing to licenses to operate. So the work had to continue but within a more stressful environment. We began a two-month program with weekly emotional support meetings for providers to address the anxiety and stress they were facing. In general, the work continued as we tried to adjust to needs, but it hasn't been easy for staff as we've seen directly the devastating impacts on our served communities and many of us are directly impacted ourselves.

Finally, I'd like to close by saying that we already had a childcare shortage in Minnesota and in the nation. Now we will have an even steeper issue if we are not able to support providers to make it through in this ongoing operation. And the big questions for my parents remain. How long will this continue? Who will take care of my children if I'm detained? Who will help me pay the house bills if my partner is detained? My children are US citizens yet they are treated as if they are not. What conversations do I have with them about this without further traumatizing them? I can tell you that my nine-year-old niece knows that she has to say she's a US citizen if the car is stopped at any point. Amigos, the light has seen Minnesotans stepping up to help their neighbors. May we all find strength to continue pushing back and defending our communities. We can't let them steal our joy. We are part of the resistencia. Much gracias.

Rochelle Garza – Mary, go ahead, Mary.

Mary Hernandez, *Executive Director, Mi CASA (Comunidad, Apoyo, Solidaridad y Amistad)* – Buenas tardes, y gracias por la oportunidad de hablar hoy. Yo soy Mary Hernandez. I'm one of 5 Latina founders of Mi Casa — which stands for Comunidad Apoyo Solidaridad y Amistad. I am a mother of four, three of them which were born and raised in Shakopee, Minnesota. At Mi Casa, we believe in something simple but powerful. We're building the city our children deserve. Mi Casa is not just a program. We're a movement embedded in the fabric of Scott and Carver County. Our work is rooted in community culture as our culture and our traditions are not something we check out at the border. We believe that when



**Mary
Hernandez**
*Executive Director,
Mi CASA*

our families are supported, entire communities thrive. We focus on shortening the line for families who need support. Our approach is not charity, it's change. We work to remove barriers and create systems that respond to real community needs. As of today, our services include culturally responsive mental health support, food distributions, workforce development, community wellness initiative, and youth empowerment. All of these are designed to help build a healthy and thriving community.

What we have seen in the last 90 days has been a significant increase of demand for essential services. We went from a hundred families a week going through our pantry to 1,400 a week receiving food. Mi Casa's response has strengthened partnerships and expanded our reach all the way out to St. Cloud and McLeod. We partner with Unidos Minnesota, which has equipped us and trained us to provide responder training for our volunteers and allies, ensuring that all the people delivering food and resources are also prepared to respond to community needs with care and cultural understanding. Through these collaborations and with the support of many local organizations, Mi Casa has helped distribute over five million pounds of food to families in our area in the last 90 days. At Mi Casa, our goal is clear — to build a healthy, thriving community where every family and every child has the opportunity to succeed. With this said, as we continue to hear the name Metro Surge and Time magazine quoted "our city under siege", our mothers delivering at home for fear of going to the hospital and seeing our parents detained, seeing ICE agents walking into the hospital and arresting them. We had 200 of our students in Shakopee stop attending school and a class of 23 students — 8 showed up. Our districts were not equipped and prepared to have two teachers, one for virtual and one for in person. Truancy calls were made to our parents at our schools as our families were keeping the students at home.

We organized to say back off. We worked with our administration to ask them to understand something that's not easy to grasp for any of us. This fear has been paralyzing for our families to the point where we were arrested as we were taking our garbage outside our own homes. We were being watched. We were being haunted with enforcement in ways that felt more than aggressive and unpredictable. It's our lives that were at stake. Our humanity was being ripped from us. We were taking shelter where we couldn't even exit our front door. We feel exhausted. We are heartbroken and yet we carry deep pride and call ourselves proud to be Minnesotans because we have seen our community come together. We

have stepped up to support those families in need from St. Cloud to McLeod to the cities. Too often our communities such as Shakopee, McLeod, St. Cloud are invisible during this moment as we saw it hit our Twin Cities with the same fear but limit our resources and support. Mi Casa stepped up with the support of Unidos Minnesota and other organizations and partnerships as we know that not one single organization could carry this weight alone.

These experiences have left deep wounds that will last for generations. When our children have grown up witnessing how much we have feared, the trauma of it will not disappear, it has now become part of our story and the story of generations to come. We believe in trust. We worked with word of mouth. We will not stay silent as we have seen drones as our community delivered food. Drones were all over the city. Our volunteers and our chaperones were being chased and were being intimidated. They were told by ICE agents

“These experiences have left deep wounds that will last for generations. When our children have grown up witnessing how much we have feared, the trauma of it will not disappear, it has now become part of our story and the story of generations to come.”

Mary Hernandez,
Mi CASA

that they had their addresses. They broke their windows and they said that they would shoot them in front of their kids in their homes. We stand in the line in the front lines together. We were told that Minnesota would be an example and thank God Minnesota is an example of families and community coming together. My children are growing up seeing the persecution we received, but they also have seen those allies that are with us. Our volunteers and our partners and our neighbors did step up and we're proud to call ourselves from Minnesota. The honor and the strength that humanity returned to us by showing up for your neighbors and for your community. Our freedom — vale la pena, and we stand together. Thank you.



From left to right: Francisco Segovia, Executive Director, COPAL, and Dr. Habon Abdulle, Executive Director and Founder, Ayada Leads.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you Mary. Francisco.

Francisco Segovia, Executive Director, COPAL (*Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Acción Latina*) – Thank you. Good afternoon. I'm Francisco Segovia and I serve as the Executive Director of Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Acción Latina — COPAL. I want to thank the leaders for today's hearing. It is essential that we tell the stories. Minnesota is home to vibrant immigrant communities that contribute deeply to our economy, our culture, and our democracy. Yet too often those same communities face fear, separation and violations of their fundamental rights. We as immigrants are tools to defend our rights. Our yellow vest, a whistle and a constitutional observer training booklet that we use to defend our rights. Many of us who are lucky enough to have a passport, we always carry it with us. Do people here carry their passports? Me, too. So, this is where we are right now.

Francisco Segovia
Executive Director,
COPAL

I want to share with you the story of Nora, a mother of three and a member of our community here in Minnesota. Nora's story illustrates not only the human cost of immigration enforcement but also the profound impact that these actions have on our families, children and the stability of our entire communities. So Nora reached out and wanted us to share her story because she wants justice. Here is Nora's statement:

I, Nora, thirty years old and a citizen of Ecuador, present the following statement regarding my detention, the detention of my husband, Josue, which occurred on December 1st, 2025 in the city of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the harm this event has caused to my family, especially to our children. My husband Josue is 31 years old. We are married and parents of three children. Two of our children were born in Ecuador and our youngest child was born in the United States. Joyce who is six right now, Santiago almost three, and Samuel born in Minnesota March 2025. At the moment of the incident, he was only nine months old. My husband and I entered the United States August of 2023 through the border at Eagle Pass, Texas, seeking refuge and protection. We currently have a pending asylum case before the immigration court.

While our case is being decided, we have work permits and social security numbers. Since arriving in Minnesota, we have tried to build an honest and stable life for our children. During our journey, we traveled through Colombia and walked three days through the Darién jungle to reach Panama. It was extremely

difficult to make this journey while carrying our newborn baby, but the hope of a better life gave us the strength to keep moving forward. We continued our journey through Central America and Mexico. While in Mexico, we were kidnapped for seven days by human traffickers. During that time, we were held until our relatives were forced to pay additional money for our release. After that traumatic experience, we finally reached the United States border and crossed the Rio Grande. We were detained by the US Border Patrol agents who interviewed us. We explained that we were fleeing Ecuador in seeking protection.

Afterwards, we were released with documents instructing us to appear before the immigration court. That day our lives changed, and our dreams turned into a nightmare. On December 1st, 2025 around 5:41 p.m., my husband was in his vehicle with our children, Santiago and Samuel. Again, Samuel was at the moment 9 months old. They were on their way to pick up Joyce who was being carried by a relative. When Joyce came out of the house and opened the car door to get in, ICE agents suddenly appeared and surrounded the vehicle. The agents took advantage of the open door to unlock the vehicle and gain access inside. Then they ordered my husband to exit the vehicle. My husband explained that his children were inside the car and that he did not want to leave them alone. Joyce and Santiago began crying and panicking when they saw what was happening. Despite the presence of small children, the agents used force to remove my husband from the vehicle. My husband was beaten and dragged out of the car while our children witnessed everything. After the agents took my husband away in what appears to be an Uber vehicle, my children were left completely alone inside the vehicle with the doors open. It was winter in Minnesota and the temperature that day was close to 20°. My younger children were exposed to the cold, the snow, and a situation of abandonment. My daughter Joyce cried desperately and screamed, begging them not to take her father away. The situation was extremely traumatic for them.

People nearby became alarmed when they saw children alone inside the vehicle and called the authorities of the city of Minneapolis to ask for help. The relative who was caring for Joyce witnessed what was happening from the doorway. Like many immigrants, she was afraid of being arrested and did not feel safe enough to go outside and intervene. Once the agents left, she immediately called me to tell me that immigration agents have taken my husband and that my children have been left alone. At that moment, I was in a laundromat. When I received the phone call, I began crying, asking people around for help. Someone helped me to request an Uber so I could get there quickly. Meanwhile, the relative who had been caring for Joyce picked up the children and kept them safe until I arrived. There are videos. There are videos reported by the community members showing how my children were left alone inside the vehicle in the cold and snow after the agents took their father away. There are also people who witnessed the entire scene and can testify about the use of force in the situation in which the children were left. After the detention, my husband suffered paralysis of his hands and legs due to the injuries he received. For this reason, he had been transported to the emergency room of a hospital in Iowa where he received medical treatment. As of today, my husband has been detained for more than 99 days. His health remains fragile, and I'm concerned that the conditions inside the detention center may worsen his recovery.

“Nora’s story is a reminder that behind every immigration enforcement action is a family, a child, a parent, and a community whose rights and dignity are on the line.”

– Francisco Segovia, COPAL

“ After the agents took my husband away in what appears to be an Uber vehicle, my children were left completely alone inside the vehicle with the doors open. It was winter in Minnesota and the temperature that day was close to 20°.”

– ‘Nora’ via Francisco Segovia, COPAL

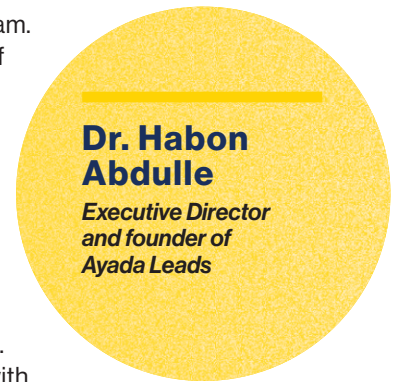
What happened has a deep emotional impact on our children. My daughter Joyce has received therapy, but she still cries at night asking why her father was taken away. Our children witnessed the violent detention of the father in the moments he was separated from them. After the rest, our family faced serious financial difficulties. We had to move to a smaller and more affordable home. For some time, I had to stop working

to care for my children. But I returned to work on March 3rd, working from 5:30 a.m. in the morning to 2:00 p.m. A family member takes care of my children while at work and kind neighbors help take the children to school. I firmly believe that my husband's detention placed the safety and well-being of our children in serious danger. The agents left the small children alone inside a vehicle in cold winter weather in Minnesota which will have had serious consequences. Our children were exposed to a traumatic and dangerous situation that no child should have ever experienced. For all these reasons, I ask for justice for my husband and protection for my family. Signature Nora, a mother who is deeply concerned about the well-being of her family. End of the story.

Nora's story is a reminder that behind every immigration enforcement action is a family, a child, a parent, and a community whose rights and dignity are on the line. As we hear these testimonies today, let us commit to centering human rights, ensuring accountability, and creating policies that protect, not punish, the families who contribute so much to our community.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you. Thank you, Francisco. Dr. Habon Abdulle

Dr. Habon Abdulle, Executive Director and founder of Ayada Leads – Salam. Good afternoon. My name is Habon Abdulle. I'm the Executive Director of Ayada Leads. Our organization works with African diaspora women and families in Minnesota, supporting them as they develop leadership, navigate institutions and strengthen connections with their communities. I wanted to begin by thanking this coalition of advocates, organizers and allies for bringing together the People's Hearing on Immigration Enforcement today. Spaces like this matter because they center the voices of those most impacted and remind us that our communities will not stay silent in the face of injustice. We know the metro enforcement surge may have scaled down but the impacts have not. Our communities are still living with its consequences. As many other colleagues here share, families are dealing with income loss, with fear of leaving their houses, with fear to go to worship houses. The experience of our community includes but are not limited to neighbors being taken from the streets, from their cars, and from their homes, from their mosque and sent to detention centers.



Recently, a young Somali woman, an American born citizen, was simply running errands in her community when she was stopped and detained. She was taken to the detention center and held there for nearly 24 hours. On the way to the detention center, she reported that she was sexually assaulted. Even after telling officers that she was a US citizen, they refused to release. She was released only when her husband physically brought her passport to the detention center to prove it. Imagine that for a moment... a citizen born in this country detained simply because of who she is and how she looks. A story like this is why so many families are living in fear right now. Over the past months at Ayada Leads, we have seen families afraid to leave their home, to go to work, to go to grocery stores, and even take the children to school. Because of that fear, many families suddenly lost income and access to basic necessities.

“Our communities should not have to carry this burden alone. People who belong here legally are being treated as if they do not matter, disappearing from the community in Minnesota and transported within hours to detention centers hundreds or even thousands of miles away. I say legally, I don’t disregard people who are undocumented here. They have rights. They have human rights and their rights need to be respected.”

–Dr. Habon Abdulle, Ayada Leads

Ayada Leads is not a service organization. Our mission as I said is leadership development and community organizing. But at this moment we had no choice but to help and step up. Our team and our community mobilized quickly. Together we helped secure food for hundreds of families across the Twin Cities and the suburbs. We connected people to mutual aid networks, community organ organizations, and neighbors willing to support one another. We help families navigate

resources, find legal information, and simply make it through the week. This is what a community looks like when systems fail us. When institutions create harm, it's often our communities that step in first to protect one another.

But let me be clear, our communities should not have to carry this burden alone. People who belong here legally are being treated as if they do not matter, disappearing from the community in Minnesota and transported within hours to detention centers hundreds or even thousands of miles away. I say legally, I don't disregard people who are undocumented here. They have rights. They have human rights and their rights need to be respected. At Ayada Leads we believe deeply in the leadership power of the immigrant community especially women to shape and make a just future. And today I'm proud to stand in solidarity with everyone gathered here. We will keep organizing. We will keep speaking the truth and we will keep fighting together until every member of our community is safe, respected and able to live with dignity. Thank you.

Rochelle Garza – Yes. HwaJeong.

HwaJeong Kim, *Council Vice President of Saint Paul City Council and Executive Director, Minnesota Voice* – I'm HwaJeong Kim. My pronouns are she/her. I'm a council member in St. Paul and I also have the honor of running a nonprofit organization called Minnesota Voice. We've been training constitutional observers with the IDN filling in community patrol shifts and helping support community dispatch and supporting localized mutual aid efforts since last summer when ICE began descending upon my state. And my first as an elected official, one of my first check-ins with one of my constituents was last June. I became a constitutional observer through the IDN August 8th. One of the first raids that happened in St. Paul was just a few blocks from my house. I represent a neighborhood and I live in a neighborhood where the vast majority of people look like us and the predominant population was not born here. So, I'm speaking both as someone that represents this community and as a naturalized citizen.



Between December 1st and March 6, together as a state, we've been able to document about 4,400 ICE incidents. And this is community vetted, community provided, but also I don't think it actually represents the full scope because this is just what we were able to witness. 827 abductions, 3,600 people detained and put on ICE flights, which means we have witnessed about 22% of the abductions and were able to document for families. The bulk of this data is from Operation Metro Surge where our daily averages were about 140 incidents per day. So, this data also doesn't include the horrors that extended into greater Minnesota since a lot of this rapid response network infrastructure is connected and mainly to the Twin Cities. In most areas of the Twin Cities and across Minnesota, everyone knows an impacted family. And this is both a product of what we've built and a statement of our beautiful interconnectedness.

“Beyond the profound human toll emerges data on the long-term economic impacts of Operation Metro Sturge. Early estimates are likely undercounted with \$200 million of economic damages in Minnesota alone with \$106 million in lost wages.”

– HwaJeong Kim,
Saint Paul City Council and Minnesota Voice

Our resistance is what we're known for, but we cannot overshadow the incredible terror and fear that our family members are experiencing. On the same day that our beloved community member, 20-year-old Jeffrey, was kidnapped without a warrant after a 5-hour standoff in a street in St. Paul, we had truth and taxation and members of our community showed up and a school social worker talked to me about how one of her students that morning was having a mental health crisis. A middle schooler was considering ending their life to make it all stop. The first week in January was one of the first documented and provable incidents of racial profiling in my neighborhood. ICE agents approached one of my neighbors, asking



Testifying from left to right: HwaJeong Kim, Council Vice President, Saint Paul City Council, and Executive Director, Minnesota Voice; and John Pacheco Jr., President & Founder, Latino Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota.

them to identify someone in a photo. They weren't able to. They asked if they knew where Hmong folks lived in our neighborhood. They declined to identify them. And they went so far as to ask, "Do you know any Asian people in your neighborhood?" This has never been about safety. It's never been about enforcing immigration laws with violence. This is just cruelty and racial profiling. A young Korean mother from my neighborhood was taken on a Thursday morning. The family wasn't able to contact her and by Monday she was in Texas. A trend that all of us understand is very very real. Her four-month baby is born here and has a DOPA in place and risks growing up without both of her parents. Her husband is also not a citizen.

To say that the federal government is enforcing broken policies with violence and tearing families apart is an understatement. Families continue to shelter in place. A mother who cleans houses just recently went back to work with no other option to keep her family afloat. On her first day back, driving between the homes that she was scheduled to clean, she was picked up by ICE and her family knew immediately because she didn't call to check-in. Families are even weighing self-deporting together. Even though they don't have to, they have every right to be here. But in order to stay together as a family, their best option sometimes is to self-deport, and they leave everything behind that they've built and had and the communities and families that they have. Businesses at my word are still afraid, but with the news that the numbers are drawing down, volunteers who staff front doors, help drive workers, and make grocery deliveries are dwindling. Multiple businesses have shared that they are threatened with closing their doors and not just because of Metro Surge, but just indefinitely for the risk and the safety of their clients. But that means entire food systems and workforce ecosystems are on their verge of collapsing from dramatic revenue losses. And it's, as we've heard before, it's just nowhere near over.

Beyond the profound human toll emerges data on the long-term economic impacts of Operation Metro Sturge. Early estimates are likely undercounted with \$200 million of economic damages in Minnesota alone with \$106 million in lost wages. Local governments are shelling out over \$3 million of overtime and over \$50 million in past rent due that has occurred in just the Twin Cities metro area. I just want to emphasize that the value of our communities isn't economic or based on the value of their labor or the fact that they put money in the pockets of greedy private equity firms to be housed. It's been a long-standing belief that our communities are more whole and caring and connected and because we all belong here.

The impacts of this violence that you have heard will be felt for generations within the state and we deserve accountability. We've heard a lot of conversations about this feeling as an assault on our civil rights, our human rights, and our constitutional rights. And to be brave in this moment is someone that knows very personally what it is like to survive a physical assault. We don't celebrate when they leave. We take stock. We try to take care. We reach out to our community members to see who's there to help bandage our wounds, heal a heart, hold us for a moment. So, when we achieve peace in our streets, it's not because of the absence of mass agents in our streets. Peace isn't about the absence of violence, but about how swiftly we receive justice. Thank you so much for being here and listening to us today. Thank you.

Rochelle Garza – John, if you want to go ahead and proceed.

John Pacheco Jr., *President, Latino Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota*

– Good afternoon. My name is John Pacheco and I'm President of the Latino Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota and my focus today is on small business, but I'd really say it's all business and that the impact here has felt greater across all work areas. How are we doing? Latino Chamber of Commerce supports Latino businesses through advocacy, networking, and resources that empower growth and success. We have over 300 and some members that we're working directly with, and there are over 12,000 Latino owned businesses in registered in Minnesota. And they primarily focused on hospitality, construction, and agriculture. In fact, my grandparents came here to work the beet fields in Moorhead 100 years ago. My parents were both born and raised in South Minneapolis and I'm still in South Minneapolis. Haven't gone far in life. So right now we do work across the board with small businesses and will refer to them. They're really hurting right now as others have said about the different levels of the economy. So, in a brief survey we found that 86% were directly impacted. 44% had temporarily closed. 28% had limited services and 51% there said they've lost over some 50 percent of their revenue. And so it's been really impacted here.



John Pacheco Jr.
President, Latino Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota

And when you start out its employees. Right now they're afraid to come to work. We've kind of learned a new language here where it's "the worst of the worst" includes a guy standing outside of Costco with a drill and a hammer hoping someone picks him up and he can go work that day. And they're risking it all to do that. But somehow they are the worst of the worst. The worst of the worst is mothers coming home from work just so she can be there with her kids. And they're the worst of the worst. And the other one is that we don't have residents. We don't have neighbors. We have aliens. So there's the time going through here that it's just it's not only the action but the language. Just the other day I told my daughter I'm going to run over to the hardware store and she immediately said, "where's your passport," and I didn't even think of it right

away but she is worried about my health and what may happen to me when I walk out the door and where I'm driving and stuff. And so we're learning, not only language, but we're learning how to survive almost in a lot of this.

Again, the impact of the labor. My son runs a restaurant, and he literally picks people up, brings them to work, and brings them back home because they're afraid to take the public bus. We're seeing that across the board. The response we're getting. And so even the city of Minneapolis, they count like \$1.1 million in lost revenue just from conventions that don't want to come here because they're afraid of what they're seeing and hearing. I think the other thing is that when we look at what it takes to provide the right economic level you have Latinos representing the largest percentage of the workforce in

Minnesota and yet we're just letting it all go away. And the thing about it too is that the amount of what we're measuring people by and what we're looking at here is the workforce the economic value they're not you know we haven't spent enough time on are some of the mental health issues, and I think that's going to be

“This city, this economy cannot grow without immigrants. We cannot grow without refugees.”

– John Pacheco Jr.
Latino Chamber of Commerce of Minnesota

the next forefront for us once we get people where the economics work for them so they can go to work and so they can participate.

What we've learned is what we've been telling folks for years is that this city, this economy cannot grow without immigrants. We cannot grow without refugees. The other thing is that we have a great network built. The Latino Chamber of Commerce is partnering with Latino Economic Development Center and others. We have a GoFundMe page that we've been raising funds for and that's going well, and that's across the board. We've had more volunteers come in from the companies to distribute food. They have more companies — folks coming in to offer to help in either marketing or other things just to help small businesses get going. We've been very active with not only nonprofits, but the faith community has come out very strong and helped us get some of their work done. I know it sounds, you know, it does sound like for some reason that, you know, the business will be okay, but I have got to tell you, they're still really struggling.

The next step is we have to look at is what's going on mentally? What's going on? What is the long-term response for our members and for members of the community? It's when we went through the murder of George Floyd and Lake Street was burnt when as you look at it now, there's been a lot of work there and it's coming around, but you can measure it by a building that's no longer there or is going up. It's hard to measure mental health as something like that is structured. You can't see it, and you can feel it and you and we know that that has to be addressed, but it's harder to get people supported when they can do something much easier like go to dinner or something which again I would support.

But in closing for me is that we have a great economic impact with Latinos across the state. We need to rebuild it. It's taking a hit right now. We have great partners in the nonprofits in the Latino community in Minnesota. Whether it's CLUES where you're at now or LEDC, Latino Lead or COPAL or HACER, or we have Esperanza so we have a good network, and it's been built over the years. I think in Minnesota here we can be very proud of the work we've done with all our allies in the community... what we've been doing with the faith community. Again I think we have a lot to look forward to a lot of the things that happen within the community is that workforce is an identity and you hate to say that is that you feel like you got to get up and go to work whether you're standing outside of Costco I said with a drill you're going to go do that whatever it takes because that's your identity that's you know and it comes with our ethnicity is that part of that identity and being you have to work and so we find that we're offering a call and saying or promoting other of these businesses saying we really need to help you. There is an article here in Minneapolis St. Paul business journal that you should all take a look at and it features a couple of businesses in there and it really talks about the challenges they're facing. So that's all I have here. Thank you.





Sara Mendoza, community member, providing testimony.



PUBLIC INPUT

Minneapolis Community Testimony

Rochelle Garza – I just want to extend my sincere gratitude to each of you for coming here today for telling your story and adding to this collection of memories and what needs to be done moving forward. I have so many questions on the advocacy piece and just kind of how the organizing works. I'm sure we'll get those questions to you later, but in the interest of time, unfortunately, we have to move to the next panel but thank you again. Let's give them another round of applause. Okay, we're going to go again. We're going to get started on the final portion of today's hearing. We're going to be hearing directly from members of the Minnesota community, folks that have wanted to come talk to us about their experiences to ensure that we hear as many voices as possible. So, this is kind of like a public comment portion of this. And so, I'm going to ask speakers to keep your remarks to approximately 3 to 4 minutes. I appreciate you being here and being willing to share your stories. For the folks that we have signed up so far, we have Xavier Vazquez, Executive Director of Centro Tyrone Guzman. We have Charlotte Carlsen, an educator. Nimco Ahmed, the founding member and organizer of the Somali American Coalition. Wintana Melekin, the founder and leader of Groundwork Institute. And Mary Anne Quiroz, the co-founder and Executive Director of Indigenous Roots Cultural Center. We're going to go ahead and get started on the left side. Xavier, if you want to kick us off.

Xavier Vazquez, *Executive Director, Centro Tyrone Guzman* – Hi, welcome. Xavier — Javier with an X. No preference. So over the last few months many of our days start at 5 in the morning and end at close to midnight. And in those long days, we witnessed things inside the homes of our community that many of us never imagined we would see. At Centro Tyrone Guzman, the oldest Latina serving non-profit in the state, we work with the Latino community every day. But what we have experienced recently is unlike anything we have seen before. We saw fathers detained or deported. We saw mothers forced to make impossible decisions. One mother had a child who needed to go to the hospital, but living in the house meant risking being detained herself. And she had two other children waiting at home. So she had to do something no parent should ever have to do. She looked at the door for a long time before opening. Then she handed her child to a stranger so that child could get medical care because if she walked out that door herself, she may never return. We trusted that stranger who wasn't a stranger to us and she trusted Centro. We also saw a mother with a premature baby during all the confusion of what was

Xavier Vazquez
*Executive Director,
 Centro Tyrone Guzman*

happening. I remember bringing that baby to the house. I told the mother, "Please stay inside." She opened the door just a little. I looked around the street to make sure nobody was nearby. Then I stepped forward and handed her baby quickly through the doorway like we were passing something illegal. But it wasn't something illegal. It was a baby. This is what was happening inside the homes of our community.

And yet in the middle of the fear, we also saw something powerful. We saw how the community responded. At Centro, we adapted quickly. Our staff is also part of our community which means they were experiencing the exact same realities our participants were experiencing. We invested in what mattered, so we stopped doing strategic planning with fellow non-profits and we asked them to support us with the planning with the current reality. We developed five committees around food distribution, rental utilities assistance, legal support, mental health support, and volunteers to support our staff and participants equally because our staff is part of our community. Our Human Resources Director became the staff case manager, supporting their family's needs, and staff became our participants' rapid response case managers. We didn't ask staff to use paid time off to deliver food or respond to families. We saw a need and we addressed it, no questions asked. And because the work is still ongoing, we currently have an open rapid response coordinator position to help centralize these efforts and manage the resources that are coming in to support the families.

Many things were left behind in the aftermath of what happened. For example, we now have a 15-year-old youth, the brother of a 5-year-old girl from our school whose family had to self-deport, who cannot leave the country because there was no DOPA signed for him before his father was deported. One of our staff members' family stepped in and became his guardian so he will not be alone in this country. These are the kinds of realities we're navigating. Families began signing DOPAs which stand for delegation of parental authority, and these are legal documents where parents assign someone who can take care of their children if something happens to them. Many of those families are enlisting people they don't know to take care of their kids. In my case, I have around 30 DOPAs under my name and I don't know half of those kids. But I made a commitment to those families that if something happens, I will find their children. Whatever they are, I will pick them up and take them somewhere safe. Even if that means bringing them back to their country of origin because no parent should have to live with the fear that their children will disappear into the system. I am trying to find time now to meet them, so they know who I am so that if something ever happens, they won't be handed to a complete stranger. Back in December, we also created a network of volunteers supporting five local businesses every single day with delivery and security so they could continue serving families safely.

"They made us one in order to pursue us. They isolated us in order to weaken us. So now we have a choice. Let's make ourselves one in order to rebuild. If anyone believed our work was meant to happen in isolation, this time it showed us something very clear. We're in this together whether we want it or not. So let's want it. Let's own it."

– Xavier Vazquez, Centro Tyrone Guzman

Food distribution, rental utilities assistance, legal support, DOPAs, supporting businesses, these were not part of our services. But we adapted because if our organizations cannot serve our community in moments of crisis, then why are we here? Our youth also stepped forward. They became advocates, protesters, caretakers, fundraisers, organizing GoFundMe campaigns for their parents because all they wanted was to see them come back home. We also decided we couldn't stay quiet. We had five interviews with Univision National. We also interviewed with Mexico and France. And most recently, about two weeks ago, a team from the United Kingdom from Channel 4, the biggest channel in the United Kingdom, followed Centre for 10 days to do a documentary of 25 minutes called Unreported World. It's going to come in about 3 weeks. So, everybody's welcome to watch it and we can share it as well.

Through all of this, we navigate a situation with a lot of mixed feelings every day. vulnerable but strong, tired but hopeful. Some people that couldn't do much because of their status did and other people who

could do more because of their privilege didn't. But even with this, we're also transformed through deep introspection. Learning to understand that people act from their own realities and experiences and we need to honor that and learn to live in peace with it. But moments like this force us to ask deeper questions. What kind of community do we want to be? Because this is not an abstract policy debate. These are decisions that can literally mean that difference between life and death for a family. When a mother believes her child is safer in the arms of a stranger than in her own arms because she fears federal agents might take away that child, we have to ask ourselves something very serious. Are we really living in the country of freedom we say we are?

This story is not the story of those families. It is a test. It's not only the story of all those families. It is a test for all of us. The question is no longer whether we know what is happening. The question is what are we going to do with that knowledge? How are we using it to transform ourselves individually? How are we using it to work more in collaboration as organizations? How are we using it to live behind whatever once separated us? Because we all lived through a moment when we were placed in the same category. They made us one in order to pursue us. They isolated us in order to weaken us. So now we have a choice. Let's make ourselves one in order to rebuild. If anyone believed our work was meant to happen in isolation, this time it showed us something very clear. We're in this together whether we want it or not. So let's want it. Let's own it. And let's use it as our greatest strength because the isolation we experience happened for a reason and we cannot keep supporting that reason by staying divided. If this month taught us anything, it is that none of us are outside of this story. So the question now is not who is responsible. The question is what we're going to build together from here. If there was ever a moment that proved that we're in all of this together, it is now.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you. Thank you, Xavier. We're going to turn to Charlotte.

Charlotte Carlsen, Educator – Thank you for this opportunity to talk. I'm Charlotte Carlsen. I'm a Minnesotan and a high school math educator in South Minneapolis. I teach at a school where most of our students are from immigrant families. I want to share how the occupation by federal agents has impacted and continues to impact my students, their families, and my fellow educators. Our students, like students everywhere, deserve protection and safety on their way to and from school. Instead, students have been terrified by ICE agents as they sprinted from their school bus stops to their homes. A group of our students was followed into our school parking lot by ICE and had their car surrounded by agents. A pair of students was detained by ICE while driving home from school. Another student was detained at a city bus stop. So, it's no surprise that for months, most of my students learned from home because both they and their parents could not leave their home safely. Countless students also experienced and continue to experience further trauma as parents and other loved ones were detained and or deported. Our students have taken on responsibilities young people shouldn't have to. Instead of just focusing on how to solve exponential equations, which is quite a challenge, they have had to care for their younger siblings and run essential errands. In each class, there are multiple students working full-time hours to support their family. Many of them have also had to navigate the complicated and inhumane system of immigration detention.



“While I’m incredibly proud of the work of our staff and neighbors, I’m angry that we had to channel our energy into responding to a public safety and economic emergency created by our own federal government.”

– Charlotte Carlsen, Educator

Every day I am in awe of the resilience of my students, but I am enraged that they and their families are experiencing collective trauma due to racist, unlawful, and inhumane actions by our federal immigration agents. As educators, the trust families place in us puts us in a unique position to provide support, and we have. We created a food shelf on campus. We organized daily school patrols. We provided rides for students. We connected families with lawyers

and mutual aid organizations. We helped students locate loved ones in detention. And heartbreakingly, we've also arranged self-deportation flights for families. And we are still doing this work every day. And remember, this is all on top of us serving as full-time educators and for our educators of color — also on top of fearing for their own safety and their family safety. While visiting a mom who for two months was unable to leave her home safely, she thanked me for our support, sharing that her family wouldn't have been able to survive without it. While I'm incredibly proud of the work of our staff and neighbors, I'm angry that we had to channel our energy into responding to a public safety and economic emergency created by our own federal government.

We need three things. First, we need all federal immigration agents out of our community. They're still here. Second, we need accountability for the inhumane and unjust ways our community members have been treated. And third, we need resources to help our community heal from the economic emergency and collective trauma that will impact us for decades to come. Thank you.

Rochelle Garza – Nico, if you could.

Nico Ahmed, *Founding Member & Organizer, Somali American Coalition* – My name is Nico Ahmed. I am with the Somali American Coalition of Minnesota and I am a proud member of Minnesota. During my first week during the occupation of ICE, I was actually out of the country, and I remember a lot of people reaching out to me. I was devastated to watch the news and see all the pictures that were coming out of my own hometowns. While I was away, I did watch the news occasionally because it kind of made me uneasy because I left my two children here visiting two other children in Somalia at that time. While I was away, everyone was scared around me and they were like, "Hey, are you ever going to be able to get back home?" And honestly speaking, because I'm an American citizen, I never thought I had to fear ever going back home. I remember my friends reaching out to me and asking me whether I had an immigration lawyer, and I was dumbfounded. I really couldn't understand why I needed an immigration lawyer, because I'm an American. I said, "Let's just test this out. I'm going to fly home and see whether I can get back home. I did end up home safely, but I still didn't feel safe.



Nico Ahmed
*Founding Member &
Organizer, Somali-
American Coalition*

I remember making the decision that I will not be carrying my passport around because I don't have to make that justification whether I'm an American citizen or not because I am and I have every right to be here. Days later, I decided that was not the case anymore. I had to carry my passport around because the same way I felt when I was in Somalia is the same way I felt when I came back home because I didn't know whether I was going to come back home every night to see my children. That was really devastating. At the same time, I was fortunate enough to have a passport, being an American, that I could actually go shop for family members and other community members who aren't able to leave their homes. So, days and days out, like we would actually go shop, deliver groceries, but yet risk that we might not end up going home as well. That was the devastation to a country that we all came to after a civil war where we wanted to feel safe and home. It didn't feel like home anymore. That country was no longer the country that we once recognized. That country where everyone would have loved to come to and the country where people around me and around everyone that I have ever known wish that they could actually be in the United States. I didn't even feel like that was the proud country that I once felt proud of.

Nevertheless, the stories and the things that were unfolding around us were painful. Seeing an elderly woman taken into custody, becoming unconscious, and ending up in a coma, her family not knowing where she is, and after we went to the hospital, her name was not listed in any patients that were in the hospital. But yet she was in that hospital. ICE decided to change her name. Now she is in a coma shackled in her bed and no one can find her. Same families. These families all came to this country legally. They just happened to come during a different president — President Joe Biden. He was still the president of the United States. They came legally to this country, but now their documents are not recognized. Their legal status does not

mean anything. I remember my friend Wantana reaching out to me about a family of 11 — 6 of them blind. They still have a status. They came a little over a year ago to the country, but now ICE is banging on their doors. They aren't able to go out. They don't know many people in this state. They recently arrived. The only people that know of them are the schools that their children went to. Now they have to actually appear in ICE custody. Now we have to take them. We don't know if they will ever return home. 6 of them are blind. They have legal documents. What is the reason why they actually have to appear in ICE custody? These are devastating stories. Our lives aren't recognizable at this moment.

“These families all came to this country legally. They just happened to come during a different president.”

—Nico Ahmed
Somali-American Coalition

Still, people are afraid to leave their homes. People are afraid to do basic things such as the things that you and I take for granted. You crave ice cream; you can get out and get ice cream. That is not happening. you want to get some water or some bread for your children, that is not something that most of us can do anymore or most of the people that are around us. But the state of Minnesota came out for the immigrant communities. When I say I'm a proud Minnesotan, if I can change my name to Minnesota today, I would because that's how proud I am of my state. There's no place I'd rather be than the state. And there's no place I'd rather be around than with these people here. Thank you so much.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you.

Mary Anne Quiroz – My name is Mary Anne Quiroz. I am an immigrant, a matriarch, a mother of five, and grandmother of one and DOPA for 23 minors. I'm also an abundance practitioner. I have lived here in the east side of St. Paul where we are all at right now ancestral homelands of the Dakota & Ojibwe peoples. My family and I immigrated from the Philippines back in 1989 and this is the only neighborhood I've been in. I'm one of the co-founders and Executive Director of Indigenous Roots. We're located just right across the street. We're a multicultural, multidisciplinary, and multi-generational hub and organization. Looking back these past six months, even before Operation Surge in December, Indigenous Roots, like many organizations and neighborhood groups, took courage, got trained, responded, and protected neighbors and families from across the state. We filled the gaps to provide food and housing security with rapid response and mutual aid efforts. Back in December, I was followed by ICE agents for three days between the center and in my home. They would park their car outside, watch me, follow me to the grocery store. I didn't care if I had my children in the car. This was a result of me showing up at a raid right here at Centro Max with Don Henry with a two-hour standoff with ICE, and they must have not liked what I said because they stuck by my side for those days. It was the first time I felt fear of being separated from my children.

Mary Anne Quiroz

*Executive Director
and a co-founder of
Indigenous Roots*

We all did the best that we could with what we had. Our \$1 million humble organization, a small and mighty team of four salaried staff with no benefits, stepped up in solidarity with neighbors, business owners, youth, and elders to create the St. Paul Community Action Network in December, which expanded into the Minnesota Community Action Network, or Mini-CAN, as we like to call it, to continue filling the gaps. Our community pantry and closet continues to operate today, Monday through Friday, from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. with pickup and delivery options. I say this because hundreds of households and families still come because they are in need of food. We have provided over \$500,000 in rental assistance, legal funding, and other mutual aid support. Now, if you do the math, that's half of our operating budget as a small organization.

“I am an immigrant, a matriarch, a mother of five, and grandmother of one and DOPA for 23 minors.”

—Mary Anne Quiroz,
Indigenous Roots

We are no strangers to crisis and community response. We have been fighting for justice from day one, doing immigration rights marches in the early 2000s, fighting for our solidarity with black and brown relatives through Black Lives Matter, Native Lives Matter. But this time, it was something different. It didn't matter what race, gender, culture, background, or citizenship status you had. We all had to protect each other. We fight and resist. We rest and care for one another. But we're all really exhausted. I'm really exhausted. But today, we process the terror and trauma, but we also look and build forward. There's still 500 agents in the state of Minnesota. The metro surge may have decreased, but they are hitting up greater Minnesota more than ever. We stay vigilant. We need to continue fighting for each other. We have demonstrated and practiced abundance locally and nationally. We have to see and feel beyond what we have experienced for the sake of my children, your children, the future generations. We demand accountability from the government. We demand care and abundance in resources. Thank you.

Rochelle Garza – Wintana.

Wintana Melekin, *Founder & Leader, Groundwork Institute* – Hello everyone. Thank you for having me here. My name is Wintana Melekin. I am the founder of Groundwork Institute. We're a statewide organization dedicated to developing the next generation of leaders. I'm also a proud Minnesotan and a proud immigrant from Eritrea. This journey for me, has always been a part of my story because I'm an immigrant, a Black immigrant at that. And when ICE first began to escalate, I remember sitting, with my family, it was Thanksgiving Day, and the president had tweeted about Minnesota. And I actually remember becoming fully paralyzed by that news. I have always been a very bold leader and very much a risk taker, occupying and protesting anywhere at all times and being very invested in my community. But that day on Thanksgiving, I just was completely shut down. I disappeared. You could not find me for weeks. And over the next couple weeks, I watched people I love start to disappear. And I tried my best to continue to be a part of my community, and I kept doing the work, but I did it undercover and very quietly.

And then one day, my neighbor, Carlo Franco, a school board member, called my phone. It was about 10:00 a.m. on a Sunday, and he said, "Hey, someone just got detained by where you live. Can I give them your phone number so that you can help them and connect them to resources?" And I said, "Yes, of course," and he gave them my number. Two seconds later, my cousin called me. I thought she was calling me to socialize. What happened was ICE actually showed up at my family's church and they detained another relative of mine, a US-born citizen, ripped her out of her car, took her to ICE detention, refused to release her, and said to us that they were sending her to Texas. They didn't believe she was a citizen. They didn't want to do the work to look her up. And as someone who's very deeply rooted in politics, I called everyone I could, every elected official, and ICE was just set on shipping her away, regardless of the fact that she was a US citizen. I eventually ended up having to drive to Whipple somewhere that I had been, which is our federal detention center, which I had been avoiding at all cost and I had to stand outside because they refused to let us in and wait for them, wait for them to take her papers from me and then release her to me.

After that moment, I completely changed the way I behave. I became very public and very loud because what I've realized is that my silence was not protecting me. It was not protecting my neighbors. It was not protecting my family. Since then, working with many



Wintana Melekin, Founder & Leader, Groundwork Institute, providing testimony.

people including Nico, we've built an amazing network of leaders who have been doing everything to protect folks. Some of the stories I want to share as Nico shared the family where they had multiple blind family members called into an ICE hearing with almost no notice. We helped connect them with attorneys and translators. Just last night I got a phone call with someone held in ICE detention who just doesn't speak English at all and has no idea what's happening to them. When I landed from my flight or when I talked this morning when I met with my local labor union, they told me that they had a member in Texas with a severe eye disease and is getting released, but no one knows how to get a hold of them. So, we've been working on that. I've helped people who have to figure out where pets go after ICE has picked up the parents and left them with no one. We've had to book flights for people. We've helped get folks home from New Mexico, from Texas, and in a few moments notice we have been scheduling flights and getting people home. We've helped veterans, so many veterans that have been picked up by ICE by just being, you know, observers or just walking the streets. And then I think one of the most difficult experiences for me is that you know my mother's best friend called me one day while I was at my office and her sister had been sheltering in place for 15 days and this was the day that Bovino had left Minnesota and so her sister went home and ICE showed up 20 minutes later and she had believed that ICE had left our state and she thought she was safe, and she's documented — but what the lesson that we've learned is that we are never safe. Today at this very moment people will tell you that ICE has left but I've already received phone calls today from people needing support. And so I say all this to share all these stories.

“I will not give up. I will not end my service. I will not finish the work that I do until I see all of my neighbors back home.”

—Wintana Melekin,
Groundwork Institute

I specifically want to share that we have three clear demands as Minnesotans that we've talked about. We want every ICE agent out of our state. This is a brand-new agency that is nonfunctioning and not serving its purpose. We want them out. Second, we want all of our people returned. There are thousands of people still sitting in ICE detention who have no reason to be there. We don't just want them to leave. We want our people returned. And lastly, we want to be refunded and invested in for the damage that this administration has

caused. Our state is in a deficit because of it. Our small businesses are seeing an 80% decrease in sales. Folks are unable to go to work, and we deserve to be resourced and refunded for all of this horrible, horrible activity. I close this out by saying I started this journey being quiet. I started this journey being silent and I will end it with all of my people out. I will not give up. I will not end my service. I will not finish the work that I do until I see all of my neighbors back home. And I thank you for being here. And I hope everyone will join us in this movement to get our folks home, dismantle ICE, and invest in Minnesota.

Rochelle Garza – Thank you. Thank you so much for being here, for sharing your stories. You know, I know you're our last panel. You're closing us out here. I say this not as the Chair of the Commission on Civil Rights. I say this as a human being, as somebody who has lived on the border and seen the things that you all have seen, I am touched deeply by the kind of community response that you all have brought together. Helping your neighbors, being willing to take children into your homes. I had neighbors that did that in Brownsville during family separation. We were on the front lines of family separation during the first Trump administration. and we saw all of the tactics and the ugliness that you all are experiencing here. And it breaks my heart as an American. My family's been here for five generations. My grandfather fought in World War II. This isn't the America that I believe in. This is not the promise of America. And I thank you for being honest, for bringing your vulnerability and your pain because it is painful. But you have each other. We have each other and you've got people all over the country that are looking at what you've done here and are proud because I'm proud. You all make me proud to be an American truly. So, thank you for being here. Thank you to the folks who organized this — Frankie from Hispanic Federation, our dear friend Luis Miranda, Katharine Pichardo, and then just all of the people behind the cameras behind the scenes. I don't know if they want me to shout out their names. You know, there are just so many people that put this together that made this a reality. And although this is not an official hearing of the Commission on Civil Rights, I will take your stories back with me to the Commission because we have been asked to look into this issue since September. The Congressional Hispanic Caucus brought this issue up and it is something that just keeps

rearing its head and it's going to worsen if we don't do something about it. So, this is part of doing something about it. So, thank you. Thank you for your time.

Sara Mendoza Reyes, *Community member* – Hi everyone.

Rochelle Garza – Hi. If you could give us your name.

Sara Mendoza Reyes – Hi everyone. My name is Sara Mendoza Reyes. A lot of people know me as Sara Kings. I am very, very, very grateful for everyone being here and using your voice and your time to speak up regarding the civil rights violations of the people of the United States. Looking specifically at what's been happening over the last couple months, specifically in Minnesota. Thank you to each and every one of you for speaking up, continuing to show up even though it's been life-threatening situations at times. I am the daughter of immigrant parents, and I was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota. However, I was raised here and in a small town in Jalisco, Mexico. As you know, it's been very impacted out there and we have had multiple family members, multiple friends, members of the community, taken, kidnapped, some of these people by officials, federal officials, and other people by unmasked unidentified agents. In the middle of December of this past year — I went through something very traumatic that I still have yet to process. However, for the last couple months that I've been here again in Minnesota, I've been focusing primarily on feeding families in Minnesota regardless of doing that with a church, with individuals, and with other organizations. At the end of the day, I feel like a lot of our end goal is to help as best as we can from the bottom part of Minnesota to the very top and to spread that out because it's been happening as we see in different states as well.



Sarah Mendoza Reyes
Community member

In the middle of December — as we know, a lot of unmasked unidentified agents had been taking people off of the streets. And the day after Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe around December 14th, it was a Sunday and there was a group that was taken or that was a couple were taken from a job site, a roofing job site. There were five people. Two of them were US citizens. There was one last standing when I showed up. Thank you to everyone that's also been using social media to advocate about the issues happening in our state because it's allowed us to have the documentation and the appropriate evidence needed to move forward with the civil rights violation case and just to make a big difference, right, which is what we want at the end of the day. I showed up that day because 30 minutes prior to showing up, some people had posted it live. They needed help. They were surrounded by unmasked, unidentified agents. And when I showed up, I showed up with blankets, a friend of mine, and food in a bag. When we arrived, there were hundreds of people. However, 30 minutes prior to that, it was three or four people that had shared the live feed and not anyone was really responding. So it was very scary for them and for anyone as well that was out there because it was -20-degree weather and as we know it gets very very dangerous, life-threatening. So, these people were there for five hours working on a roof. Unidentified agents showed up and they were basically up there for a long time. When I showed up, I was at the forefront and I asked them if they had the proper warrant, if they were able to at least identify themselves so we knew what was happening exactly. They denied all of that from everybody that was there. There were a lot of news reporters. There were a lot of people. There were a lot of children. There were babies, too, because family members of those people that were up there working had shown up with their children because they were just so scared and they didn't know what was happening. And at the same time, I see ICE agents, what are presumed to be ICE agents, with big guns, with pepper spray, and pepper spray aiming it towards the crowd, knowing that there were children surrounding us, and not just children, babies. I understand that we have been having this issue for a long time but anything is possible if we continue to unite and fight towards those injustices. That day I almost lost my life because they failed to show proper identification. The man up there that was left standing was in a very critical condition. The second to last person did receive medical attention. However, they were detained. It was the brother of the last person that was standing up there. So, the second to last person, they were in ICE detention. Even though he wasn't presented with a warrant, he wasn't given identification on behalf of the agents. However, he was released on over \$10,000 bond the day of... I believe like the day before Christmas Eve, and he messaged me and he reached out. I don't know how he found me and he said,

"Thank you so much. I just got out. He sent me a picture with his wife and his little kid. They hugged him and he told me I didn't know what had happened. All I knew was that they had taken me. I was so scared for my life. I was scared for my brother's life who was up there. I didn't know what had happened to him. I didn't know that you were able to reach out to him and the rest of the community of Minnesota that was present that day. When they failed to present identification, I noticed that the back part was wooded and it did not have tape. And this person was puffy from the coldness. He didn't have gloves. He didn't have a hat. He just had his bare hands working on a roof. And if we know that is very very dangerous to be working in extreme conditions like that, especially on top of a roof. When I went through the back part, I ended up in the basement. I found my way up because I heard right behind us, "Stop. We're going to pepper spray you guys."

I was genuinely concerned for this person because if it was any of us, we would have wanted someone to step up and at least hold her hand or at least tell us that everything's going to be okay or that everything's, you know? Because they were running after me and I was just very confused at the moment, I didn't even know what to expect. All I knew was that we were showing up for our community. And so I ran like I went up the stairs. It was really icy. I ran up the stairs. I kicked it. I kept climbing up the wood. I didn't have gloves that day either. And I splinted all my hands getting up. I never intended for this to be public. I was honestly just doing this out of my heart. And I just wanted to help out. I brought him a bag with tamales, and a blanket. And when I got up there, I looked down and I was surrounded by 10 ICE agents with guns drawn at us. I had no weapons on me and neither did Marco. He's from Ecuador. He wanted to get down right before I went up. He told me to not go up and he was scared for my safety when he was the one up there for 5 hours. They had spent the whole day working there without food and they were looking forward to just getting lunch. And so I told him to just hold on a little longer. Everyone was rooting for him. While people were distracted at the forefront in front of the tape, they were telling the agents it's not worth it. This is a human being. They deserve, you know, to be treated properly. There's no warrant. There's nothing that we're supposed to have under our civil rights, under the constitution, under laws. And as we can see, laws have been changing all the time.

Recently they've mentioned through various sources that anyone interfering even though there was no proof of them being ICE agents, no proof of them being federal and no proof of a warrant to not engage. And this is very dangerous because not only are people that are undocumented that are working in extreme conditions are being affected. Children and minors are being affected as well. Babies, mothers with kids, mothers that are pregnant have lost their lives directly as a result of the violent aggression used on the citizens of Minnesota.

And so that day when they had their guns drawn at us, all I could do was look into his eyes and tell him everything's going to be okay. I didn't know what was going to happen to either one of us. And then my mom calls and then she's like, "Sara, where are you?" "Oh, what are you doing?" And I told her, "Oh, yeah. I'm just doing errands. It's a Sunday." "Okay, I'll see you later." Prior to that, I had spent weeks every day making sure that in some way, shape, or form, I was able to help out families in need that had been reaching out because I grew up in the community of Minnesota as well. And I've helped a lot of families get resources and things like that. I am not a member of an organization or a church. I just know that I am a member of this community of Minnesota, of the United States, and of the people. And we, the people, regardless of documentation or not, deserve to have our voices heard. We deserve the rights that the civil rights movement brought to us. After I hung up on that day with my mom, after I hung up on her, we waited another hour up there. They finally left and everyone barged in through the walls because it wasn't even walls, it was sticks and they were moving in the wind. And I really thought that that was it. I told my mom I loved her right before hanging up and I didn't explain to her what was really happening because I didn't want her to know that I was risking my life essentially. But I didn't care because this is a human being and we stand up for our neighbors.

We stand up for the human beings that make up this country. Thank you guys. It hasn't been just physical abuse. It's been financial, psychological, emotional, and it isn't just, like we've said, it's not targeted towards a certain group. It's targeted to a bigger population. And that population is the population of the people, of the vulnerable, of those who do not or may not know their rights. There's people that we've helped out that don't know how to read and write and their husband gets detained and what do we do when we then

when they call us and they're like, "We were just wondering if you could help us out because we don't even know how to fill these forms out and it's been weeks. We're frustrated and we're scared our husband isn't showing up in the system." This has happened on so many occasions and on various of them. I have reached out to the police departments so that they could come out whenever they have kidnapped a child of a community and it's gone live on a friend's feed. Whenever people have reached out for help in other ways, social media or in person. There's people that are also so scared that they haven't left in months, they don't have phone service, so they can't even contact anyone. So, when they go outside, a lot of them, that's the last time that they're able to go out and leave minors, leaving pets at home. We're here to stand and speak on behalf of everyone, including animals, because their lives matter too.

Everybody and anybody. And moving forward from this incident, we were able to help the gentleman at the end escape the situation. Thank God. And a month later, his brother is released, but after having to pay thousands and thousands of dollars on a bond when he did not have the process that he should have had.

And so I come here to speak on behalf of everybody. I dream of a day one day where we are able to uphold life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for everybody in the United States. There is asylum seekers that we've helped that have had their asylum cases stopped, canceled, removed, people that had legal pathways and came through those legal pathways that got them removed as well. And we don't know what to tell them because they need more money for lawyers in order to continue their case. They're not able to represent themselves. At first, we started with just food from our own pockets. We would just buy bags of food and turn them into the families that would reach out for help so that at least they had something for now. And then we would have their documents like their information written down on paper just so that they weren't public or able to be tampered with. And from there we would check up on them every two weeks, every three weeks. A lot of women gave birth in their own homes. We thank the retired nurses that went personally to those homes. We thank all the volunteers and the members of the community for their time and their efforts to make sure that they provide safety and protection for the community. Something that unfortunately those that are called to serve and protect have not been doing so. When we've reached out for help, all we get told is they cannot interfere with federal operations. Even though these are not federal operations that are known to us.

So, to sum everything up, this is not just one or 100 or a thousand families. This is over 10,000 families. There's still effects. ICE is still present in Minnesota. We need change as you've heard, and I was able to fortunately hear the live stream before this. I thank every single one of the people that were here to speak on behalf of those who are too scared to have a public voice. I'd like to thank everyone that's here on behalf of the students, people that have been threatened, managers that have been threatened to be fired for the simple reason of letting their workers know that ICE is staying in their premises. And so with this, I urge you to think of humanity, our civil rights, to think of everything that Martin Luther King stood up for, to think of everything that we stand for as a community here in Minnesota. Because if you're from here, you know that it's beautiful. Everybody gets together regardless of race, gender, identity, sexuality. And at the end of the day, what matters is just staying united and forgetting everything that they're trying to use to divide us, such as documentation or not. At the end of the day, those are lives. At the end of the day, they deserve a voice, too. And so, my dream is to one day refrain from using the term illegal and alien because no one is illegal on stolen land, land where natives are taken as well. Students of the University of Minnesota where I attended are so scared to go to their classes and a lot of these teachers are not accommodating their needs. So, it's not just people of color. It's not just citizens. It's not just students. It's everyone. Everyone who does not agree with the tactics and the harassment and are standing up for one another. Thank you so much for your time. Thank you for everything you're doing. I hope to connect with you all one way or another so we can continue moving forward from these traumas and the violations of our Constitution so we can one day have a place where we uphold life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Thank you so much.

"I dream of a day one day where we are able to uphold life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for everybody in the United States."

– Sarah Mendoza Reyes,
Community member

Rochelle Garza – Thank you. All right, that officially closes us out. Thank you so much.

DRAFT

To view the People’s Hearing on Immigration Enforcement in Minnesota, go to:

hisped.info/MNforum

For a digital copy of this report, go to:

hisped.info/MNrecord

