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October 29, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

David J. Venturella
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Mullin and Acting Director Venturella:

I am writing to demand a thorough investigation into recent federal immigration enforcement operations across California's Central Coast. This includes the reported detention and injury of one of my constituents, Erik Zepeda, a U.S. citizen and high school student walking to school in Santa Maria, California. Beyond this incident, I have seen alarming reports of U.S. citizens being detained and injured and heard of families and farmworkers with no criminal record who have been caught up in aggressive interior enforcement actions. More importantly, I have serious concerns that a growing number of individuals are being targeted based on their race, ethnicity, or perceived immigration status. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) must be accountable to the public and to the communities they serve, including my constituents. I expect this investigation to look at what happened, how these operations comply with constitutional protections, and what steps DHS and ICE are taking to prevent wrongful detention and discriminatory enforcement.

On October 21, 2026, federal agents reportedly detained Erik Zepeda, a 20-year-old U.S. citizen and Santa Maria High School student with disabilities as he walked to school. According to local news reports, agents tackled and restrained him, questioned him about his identity and citizenship while he was in their vehicle, and released him near where they had detained him[1].He continued to school, where staff observed his injuries and called an ambulance. He was hospitalized and underwent surgery for injuries sustained to his wrists because of his wrongful detainment by ICE. Reports also indicate that the student had identification with him, yet agents did not ask to see it before detaining him. ICE's claim that he matched the description of a person they were seeking and resisted commands does not resolve the serious questions raised by

[1] https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2026-10-23/santa-maria-high-school-student-u-s-citizen-is-injured-as-ice-detains-him

this encounter. The detention of a U.S. citizen that reportedly left him hospitalized and requiring surgery demands a full, transparent investigation and accountability for any misconduct.

Unfortunately, the reports of excessive use of force, violation of constitutional rights, and profiling of individuals based on their perceived immigration status extend beyond this one incident. According to 805 UndocuFund, 114 people were detained during a weeklong enforcement operation from October 5 through October 11 across Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Ventura Counties[2]. Reports describe enforcement actions at workplaces, inside churches, in neighborhoods, on busy streets, and near schools. Just weeks earlier, on October 5, immigration agents detained the father of Mayrin, an Allan Hancock College student, in a campus parking lot as the two arrived at school. Farmworkers across the Central Coast have also faced severe enforcement actions at fields where they do the backbreaking work that helps feed the nation.

We are seeing a rising tide of rhetoric that seeks to turn neighbor against neighbor, painting human beings not as individuals with dreams and rights, but as numbers and political bargaining chips. We continue to hear people fan the flames of division and say all these actions are justifiable because they are targeting criminals.

However, the data we have does not back up this claim. According to the Migration Policy Institute's (MPI) October 2026 analysis, DHS completed an estimated 980,000 deportations and returns during the first 18 months of the second Trump administration, including formal removals, other returns, and departures classified as voluntary. MPI found that only about 20 percent of the people included in that total had criminal convictions[3]. Among immigrants who had lived in the United States for at least two years before being deported, 71 percent had no criminal conviction. These findings raise important questions as to whether the people being targeted match the administration's stated focus on individuals who pose a public safety threat and have criminal convictions.

To better understand these incidents and ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place, I request written responses to the following questions:

1. **Investigation into the Santa Maria student's detention:** What is DHS and ICE's account of the October 21 incident involving Erik Zepeda? What steps are being taken to investigate the use of force, the decision to detain the student, and the process used to verify his identity and citizenship? Did agents know or have reason to know that he had a disability, and what protocols apply in such circumstances? Please preserve and provide relevant body-worn camera footage, vehicle recordings, incident reports, and other records, consistent with applicable law.
2. **Central Coast enforcement operations:** How many immigration enforcement operations have DHS and ICE conducted in Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Ventura Counties since January

[2] https://www.sanluisobispo.com/news/local/article317562167.html
[3] https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/trump-administration-oversaw-980000-deportations-during-first-18-months-2026-10-22/

20, 2025? For the October 5–11 operation in particular, please provide the number of people detained, the locations and circumstances of those detentions, the agencies involved, and the number of individuals released without further enforcement action or proceedings.

3. **Detention of U.S. citizens:** How many U.S. citizens have been detained by ICE nationwide and in California since January 20, 2025? For these cases, please provide information on the circumstances of detention, the length of detention, any use of force, what documentation does ICE and DHS require to verify U.S citizenship, and whether complaints were filed.
4. **Safeguards against racial profiling:** What policies and safeguards do DHS and ICE have in place to prevent individuals from being targeted based on race, ethnicity, or perceived immigration status? How many complaints alleging racial profiling or discriminatory enforcement have been received since January 20, 2025, and how many have resulted in investigations or findings of misconduct?
5. **Identity verification and disability protocols:** What procedures must agents follow to verify a person's identity and citizenship before or during detention? What additional guidance applies when interacting with individuals with disabilities or limited verbal communication, including how agents should assess whether a person understands and can comply with commands?

President John F. Kennedy said in his 1963 address to the nation on civil rights, "[..]the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened."[4] More than 60 years later, this statement remains just as true. The Constitution and the Supreme Court of the United States have affirmed that many fundamental constitutional protections extend to all people in the United States, not just citizens. Our government has a responsibility to uphold those protections and live up to our nation's promise of liberty and justice for all. Immigration enforcement must be carried out in accordance with the Constitution and compliance with the spirit and letter of the law.

A U.S. citizen student was detained and injured on his way to school. Farmworkers across the Central Coast have faced enforcement actions that leave them fearful of being detained while simply doing their jobs. General platitudes that immigration agents are following agency policy are not enough. DHS and ICE must explain what happened, investigate potential misconduct, and take steps to prevent these incidents from happening again. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress

[4] https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/jfk-civilrights/