

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 5, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Mullin:

We write to demand that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) immediately remove from field duty all U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers hired and trained during the 2025 hiring surge, and that those officers be required to complete comprehensive retraining and re-vetting before being permitted to return to enforcement operations. Over the past year, public reporting on DHS's hiring and training requirements, and the conduct of its officers in the field, demonstrates that ICE officers hired during this surge cannot be trusted with a badge and the authority to make arrests. These concerns are heightened now that ICE is preparing a second hiring surge of 5,000 employees before year's end without having completed background investigations for thousands of hires from the first.¹

On September 3, 2026, The New York Times reported that a 17-year ICE veteran who oversaw background investigations made a formal whistleblower complaint last year, expressing concern about a systemic breakdown in the vetting of thousands of ICE recruits brought on during the agency's rapid expansion.² According to the complaint, ICE's human resources division routinely extended final job offers before candidates had completed basic fingerprint, identity, or credit checks, and political appointees were permitted to bypass standard background investigations to obtain national security eligibility.³ The complaint, filed with the DHS Office of Inspector General, warned that this unprecedented lowering of hiring standards left the agency vulnerable to insider threats, infiltration, and foreign influence, and it called on DHS to immediately suspend the improper practices, hold accountable those responsible, and review recent hires for potential insider threats.⁴ A separate whistleblower, a former ICE Academy instructor and agency attorney, separately disclosed that ICE cut training hours on use of force, firearms safety, and the constitutional rights of the public during this same period.⁵

¹ Alexandra Berzon & Hamed Aleaziz, *ICE Plans 5,000 New Hires to Help with Deportation Drive*, N.Y. TIMES (Sept. 29, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/29/us/ice-hiring-immigration-enforcement-vetting.html>.

² Alexandra Berzon et. al., *ICE Agents Were Fast-Tracked Despite Vetting Failures, Whistle-Blower Says*, N.Y. TIMES (Sept. 3, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/03/us/ice-recruits-national-security-risk-whistleblower.html>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Ryan Foley, *ICE Whistleblower Warned of 'Unprecedented Lowering of Standards' During Hiring Spree*, Wash. Times (Sept. 3, 2026), <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2026/sep/3/ice-whistleblower-warned-unprecedented-lowering-standards-hiring/>.

⁵ Geoff Bennett, *Whistleblower Warns ICE has Slashed Training for Recruits*, PBS NEWS (Feb. 26, 2026), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/whistleblower-warns-ice-has-slashed-training-for-recruits>.

New reporting confirms that the vetting failures the whistleblower described persist today. On September 29, 2026, The New York Times reported that nearly 7,500 individuals hired during last year's surge are still awaiting the full background investigations required for their positions, and that they may work on a limited basis in the meantime.⁶ ICE had already removed hundreds of surge hires by this spring.⁷ Before even addressing this problem, ICE now intends to hire 5,000 more employees by year's end—a workforce expansion of roughly 17 percent in three months—and most will serve as deportation officers with arrest authority.⁸ DHS's assurances that it will apply rigorous standards to this new cohort cannot be taken at face value when it has not yet cleared the officers it already hired.⁹

These vetting and training failures preceded a series of violent and deadly incidents involving ICE officials. Over the past year, ICE and other DHS personnel have fatally shot and killed multiple people during vehicle stops and enforcement operations, including several instances in which agents opened fire on people inside their own cars:

- On January 7, 2026, an ICE officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota fatally shot Renée Good, a 37-year-old mother of three, as she attempted to drive away from agents during an enforcement operation. Witnesses reported that federal officers blocked bystanders and medics from rendering aid.¹⁰
- Less than two weeks later, Border Patrol agents fatally shot Alex Pretti, a 37-year-old intensive care nurse, during the same wave of Minneapolis enforcement operations.¹¹
- On July 7, 2026, an ICE officer in Houston, Texas fatally shot Lorenzo Salgado Araujo, a 52-year-old construction worker and father of three, while he was driving a work crew to a job site. Witnesses have disputed DHS's account that Mr. Salgado Araujo used his vehicle as a weapon.¹²
- Six days later, on July 13, 2026, an ICE officer in Biddeford, Maine fatally shot Johan Sebastián Durán Guerrero, a 25-year-old father, in his car after agents rammed his vehicle and fired multiple rounds through it while executing a warrant

⁶ *Supra* note 1.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Rebecca Cohen et. al., *ICE Officer Who Fatally Shot Minnesota Woman Was Dragged by Car During June Immigration Arrest*, NBC NEWS, (Jan. 8, 2026), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ice-officer-fatally-shot-minnesota-woman-was-dragged-car-june-immigrat-rcna252992>.

¹¹ AM. IMMIGRATION COUNCIL, *6 Deaths in ICE Custody and 2 Fatal Shootings: A Horrific Start to 2026* (Feb. 11, 2026), <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/ice-deaths-shootings-2026/>.

¹² Lomi Kriel & Eddie Gaspar, *Houston ICE Shooting Shows Likely Law Enforcement Policy Violations*, TEX. TRIB. (July 15, 2026), <https://www.texastribune.org/2026/07/15/texas-houston-ice-immigrant-shooting-video-footage/>.

for someone else. Mr. Durán Guerrero was not the target of the operation and was authorized to work in the United States.¹³

A review of shootings by federal immigration officers during this Administration found that the overwhelming majority—19 of 22 incidents identified as of July 2026—began with a vehicle stop, underscoring that ICE’s current tactics for approaching and stopping vehicles are placing officers and the public in unnecessary danger.¹⁴ These killings, combined with the whistleblower’s account of corners cut on both vetting and training, make clear that officers hired during the surge did not receive adequate instruction in de-escalation, use-of-force standards, and vehicle-stop protocols before being sent into communities with the authority to use deadly force.

DHS cannot allow officers whose backgrounds were never properly vetted, and who may never have received adequate use-of-force training, to remain on the streets with arrest authority and firearms. We therefore request that DHS:

1. Immediately suspend field enforcement duties for all ICE officers hired and deployed during the 2025 hiring surge, pending completion of full background re-vetting and use-of-force retraining.
2. Provide a full accounting of how many current ICE officers received job offers or field assignments before completing fingerprint, identity, and credit checks, and how many of those officers have discharged a firearm in the course of duty.
3. Provide ICE’s plan to hire 5,000 employees by the end of 2026, including all documents, memoranda, internal communications, staffing assessments, and analyses of staffing needs related to the plan; the vetting and training protocols that will apply to the new hires; and the name and title of each official who approved the plan.
4. Provide a copy of the whistleblower’s complaint and any Office of Inspector General findings or corrective action plan arising from it.
5. Provide a detailed accounting of the use-of-force policy and vehicle-stop protocol changes DHS has made since January 2026, including how those changes have been implemented and audited across ICE field offices.

Finally, we are deeply concerned by indications that DHS and ICE leadership may not be taking whistleblower complaints seriously. ICE’s public response to this most recent whistleblower complaint focused on defending its vetting practices rather than addressing

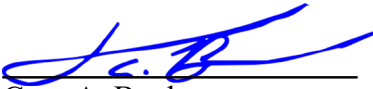
¹³ Maria Santana, *What We Know About Joan Sebastian Guerrero, Who Was Fatally Shot by an ICE Officer in Maine*, CNN (July 15, 2026), <https://www.cnn.com/2026/07/15/us/joan-sebastian-guerrero-ice-shooting-maine>.

¹⁴ Ariana Figueroa, *Traffic Stops Become a Flashpoint in ICE Shootings*, GOV’T EXEC. (July 20, 2026), <https://www.govexec.com/management/2026/07/traffic-stops-flashpoint-ice-shootings/414882/>.

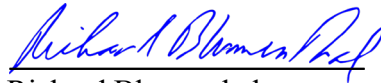
the substance of the allegations.¹⁵ Whistleblowers who come forward in good faith to report waste, fraud, abuse, or threats to public and national security are protected by federal law, and DHS has an obligation to ensure that employees who raise these concerns through proper channels are not retaliated against, sidelined, or pushed out of the agency. We therefore ask that DHS confirm, in writing, the specific steps it is taking to ensure that whistleblower complaints related to ICE hiring, vetting, and training are investigated promptly, that whistleblowers are protected from retaliation consistent with the Whistleblower Protection Act and related authorities, and that findings are shared with the appropriate oversight bodies, including Congress.

We request a written response to this letter, including responses to the items above, no later than October 13, 2026. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator

¹⁵ *Supra* note 2.