



Testimony
of

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Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

before the

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security

on

“Oversight of the Department of Homeland Security: ICE, CBP, and USCIS”

February 10, 2026
Washington, DC

Introduction

Chairman Garbarino, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) immigration enforcement and border security operations.

I am honored to represent the more than 67,000 dedicated men and women of CBP — the largest law enforcement agency in the United States. We stand watch on the front lines of our country's borders to protect the American people from external threats while facilitating lawful trade and travel, often under difficult conditions and intense public scrutiny, but always in service to the Nation. It is a privilege to join my colleagues from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Together, our agencies work in close partnership to secure our homeland and uphold the integrity of our border.

The Human Cost of Failed Policy

The past year has been one of the most consequential in the history of America's border security. Under the decisive leadership of President Donald J. Trump, Secretary Kristi Noem, and Border Czar Tom Homan, and thanks to the tireless efforts of the thousands of dedicated public servants who work at our agencies to ensure border security, CBP has fundamentally reversed years of open-border policies, achieving record-low illegal entries between ports of entry. These results reflect a clear commitment to restoring the rule of law, prioritizing the safety of the American people, and empowering our officers and agents to fulfill their critical mission.

CBP spent the last year rebuilding a devastated border defined by record encounters, overwhelmed facilities, inadequate deterrence measures, and personnel stretched to the limit. We must be unflinchingly honest about the humanitarian catastrophe that defined the previous Administration's open border policies. The same critics attacking us today for enforcing the law were silent for four years as open borders empowered cartels to engage in industrial-scale human trafficking. Nowhere was this failure more tragic than in the treatment of Unaccompanied Alien Children (UACs).

A bombshell report from the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) in August 2024 exposed the depth of this betrayal of UACs. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, CBP encountered over 500,000 unaccompanied children at the Southwest border. Investigators revealed that the government on President Biden's watch had effectively lost track of hundreds of thousands of these children, in an utter failure to ensure their safety and well-being.

The details are damning. The DHS OIG found that more than 291,000 children – out of nearly 450,000 transferred to the Department of Health and Human Services' custody – were never even issued Notices to Appear in court, and many who were served notices missed their court dates. By failing to initiate removal proceedings or determine the whereabouts of those UACs who did not appear, the previous Administration made ghosts of these children, denying them any meaningful legal or physical protection. The prior Administration released these children into the interior of our country with no supervision or controls, and no assurances that they were not

being handed directly from a coyote at the border to a trafficker in the heartland, and left them vulnerable to exploitation and other criminal acts.

Defeating the Cartel Business Model

This administrative negligence did more than just fail these children; it financed their exploitation. The vast majority of illegal immigration at our southern border is facilitated by sophisticated, ruthless cartels that have built their business model on our own policy loopholes. Cartels knew that under the Biden Administration, trafficked children would be processed and released into the interior with virtually no oversight. "Catch and release" policies that allowed illegal immigrants to remain in our country facilitated the presence of those who trafficked these children on their arrival. By failing to enforce our laws at the border, the Federal government enabled human trafficking, not just of children but of those exploited for labor, by cartels, who profited from this trafficking and used the profits to finance their illegal activities.

Breaking this cycle requires certainty of consequences and complete border security. When we secure the border and deny illegal entry, we are not just enforcing a statute – we are bankrupting a cartel operation and protecting innocent people. When illegal entry no longer guarantees release into the interior, and when UACs are protected and monitored, the cartels lose their product, their presence in the United States, and their ability to profit from our failures.

A Year of Unprecedented Enforcement and Deterrence

Today, by prioritizing law enforcement and leveraging the authorities granted to us by Congress, the United States has the most secure border in our Nation's history. We have realigned resources, applied consequences for those who break our laws, and empowered our workforce to do their jobs. Although we have experienced tremendous success ensuring unprecedented border security, every day is a new battle to prevent cartels and other criminals from operating within our country and threatening their victims and the American people. We must stay vigilant and continue to pursue effective policy and practice daily so that our success is sustained.

National security cannot exist without effective border security. Over the past year, our enforcement efforts have been nothing short of historic across all our operational environments. As I alluded to earlier, we have achieved the lowest annual encounters in CBP's history. Total U.S. Border Patrol apprehensions along the Southwest Border during the last calendar year were approximately 90,000 — a figure lower than the monthly average during the Biden Administration.¹ Daily encounters declined by 95 percent, averaging approximately 250 per day, compared to more than 5,000 per day previously. We have also seen historically low numbers of gotaways — illegal aliens who evade apprehension by CBP.

¹ The average number of monthly apprehensions during the Biden administration was 155,485, <https://www.cbp.gov/about/history/cbps-historic-first-year-under-current-administration>

This progress is the direct result of the Administration's comprehensive enforcement approach. We ended the practice of "catch-and-release," prioritized detention and removal authorities, and sent a clear message that illegal entry into the United States will not be accommodated or rewarded. Instead, consequences will be delivered consistent with law. For nine consecutive months, U.S. Border Patrol has not released any alien who entered without authorization into the United States, a powerful reflection of restored control of our border.

Policy changes and decreased encounters have allowed us to act more strategically and execute data-driven targeted operations. This has led to increased enforcement actions. For example, since January 20, 2025, CBP seized nearly 620,000 pounds of illicit drugs nationwide, an 8 percent increase over the prior year. This included nearly 11,000 pounds of fentanyl, 185,000 pounds of methamphetamine, and significant quantities of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana.²

CBP is also a foundational partner in the President's Homeland Security Task Force (HSTF). Co-led by the FBI and ICE/HSI, these task forces now operate across all 50 states to dismantle transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and foreign gangs. CBP's unique border intelligence and interdiction capabilities are force multipliers for the HSTF, ensuring that the border is no longer a gap for TCOs to exploit, but rather the starting point to dismantle their operations entirely.

Frontline Investments in Infrastructure, Technology, and our Workforce

None of these accomplishments would be possible without the historic investments in border security made by this Administration. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act, a \$65 billion border security bill, represents the largest investment in border security in a generation, providing for modern infrastructure, advanced technology, and increased law enforcement personnel.

CBP is actively executing Smart Wall construction consistent with U.S. Border Patrol requirements from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of America in support of the President's Executive Orders and CBP's statutory mission to secure the border. CBP has already placed \$12 billion in Smart Wall funding on contract, with all remaining barrier contracts scheduled for award by June 30, 2026. We anticipate completing 250 miles of new barriers by September 30, 2026. Furthermore, in January 2026, we began installing waterborne barriers in the Rio Grande, denying smugglers a key avenue for trafficking people and narcotics, enhancing natural and land-based barriers, and providing a safer operating environment for our agents.

The success of CBP's mission fundamentally relies on the expertise and dedication of our workforce. CBP is prioritizing recruiting, hiring, retention, and training to rebuild our workforce after years of attrition. Over the past year, we saw historic levels of recruitment and retention,

² <https://www.cbp.gov/about/history/cbps-historic-first-year-under-current-administration>, January 20, 2025 – January 20, 2026.

with monthly averages showing an 84 percent increase in new U.S. Border Patrol hires compared to the previous year. The Act not only supports our hiring goals by funding 5,000 more CBP officers, 3,000 Border Patrol agents, and 200 Air and Marine agents, but also provides funding for recruitment and retention, ensuring that we attract, hire, and keep the best law enforcement professionals in America.

In addition to personnel, CBP continues to invest in technology that enhances CBP's operational capabilities to detect and intercept individuals illegally crossing the border, dangerous goods and materials concealed in cargo and vehicles, and illegal activity in the air and maritime domains. With One Big Beautiful Bill funding, we are investing in non-intrusive inspection, biometrics, border surveillance equipment, aircraft, and communications systems. These investments rapidly modernize our border security posture and ensure that we remain ahead of current and emerging threats.

Supporting the Larger Federal Enforcement Mission

With record-low encounters, CBP can enhance our support of nationwide targeted operations and immigration enforcement priorities. CBP's critical support of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement interior enforcement operations enables the removal of dangerous criminals, gang members, and aliens who remain in the country illegally. CBP personnel are deployed to support targeted operations in more than 20 cities, resulting in thousands of arrests. I must note that CBP officers and agents are increasingly encountering situations in which agitators interfere with lawful enforcement actions, including attempts to obstruct arrests or intimidate law enforcement personnel. These situations are unprecedented in scale and intensity. The current operational environment puts our officers, agents, and even their families, at tremendous personal risk of violence.

Let me be clear. No law enforcement officer should be placed in a position where executing a lawful warrant or simply performing his or her lawful law enforcement duties becomes a flashpoint for confrontation with third parties. CBP officers and agents are trained to de-escalate, act professionally, and to use force only when necessary. Training cannot fully mitigate all risks created when law enforcement is undermined or publicly challenged in real time.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to emphasize that the accomplishments of the past year are not just numbers on paper. They represent lives saved, communities strengthened, and a renewed sense of safety and security for the American people. Under the unwavering leadership of President Trump and Secretary Noem, CBP delivered on its promise to secure the border, enforce the law, and protect our nation from those who would do us harm.

Our work is not complete, but we are determined to maintain and consistently increase control over our borders. We are intercepting dangerous aliens and preventing their entry. We are keeping America safe. The men and women of CBP are proud to serve, proud to protect, and proud to be part of a mission that puts the American people first.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.



Testimony
of

Todd M. Lyons

Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

before the

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Introduction

Chairman Garbarino, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members of the Committee: Thank you for the invitation to appear today to discuss the critical work U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is doing around the clock to carry out President Donald J. Trump's agenda to keep Americans safe, restore order to our communities, and return the rule of law to this country. I stand before you today with immense pride to represent the dedicated patriots who have answered the call to serve their Nation. These men and women do not just hold a job; they hold the line, saving American lives. They unapologetically enforce the laws of the United States, and they do so with a courage that humbles me every single day.

Under the leadership of President Trump and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Kristi Noem, the men and women of ICE have been empowered to do exactly what they were trained to do: arrest and remove illegal aliens and criminals from our communities. We are enhancing public safety, securing our national security, and finally restoring integrity to an immigration system that had been allowed to collapse. While all illegal aliens are eligible for removal, we have prioritized and removed tens of thousands of the "worst of the worst" – known dangerous criminals, known or suspected terrorists, and gang members who threaten our neighborhoods.

We have supercharged partnerships with state and local law enforcement, empowering officers around the country, under the authorities given to us by Congress through the 287(g) program, to help ICE identify and remove criminal aliens from the United States. Those partnerships have increased more than 900% since President Trump took office, and our communities are safer for it. We encourage more agencies and departments around the country to partner with us in this noble effort.

I am also proud of the agency's unprecedented hiring campaign that led to ICE hiring more than 12,000 officers and agents in less than a year, after more than 220,000 individuals submitted applications. This expansion of our well-trained and well-vetted workforce will further support ICE's ability to execute on the President and the Secretary's bold agenda to enforce our laws and remove illegal aliens.

A Deadly Operating Environment

Before discussing our broader operations, I must address the situation in Minnesota and the dangers that ICE agents face nationwide. While investigations remain ongoing, I am encouraged that some Minnesota officials are finally signaling a willingness to cooperate with ICE. But let me be clear: promises are not enough. We need action. The anti-ICE rhetoric from public officials not just in Minnesota but throughout the country has fomented violence against dedicated American patriots defending our homeland, and this must stop.

In the wake of the unprecedented border chaos of the previous Administration, ICE has stepped into the breach to enforce the law. This commitment has come at a cost. Our increased

enforcement has been met with a surge in threats, assaults, and doxing incidents against our employees.

We are facing the deadliest operating environment in our agency's history. ICE personnel, not to mention their families, are under assault like never before in this country. In Fiscal Year 2025, death threats against ICE personnel increased by more than 8,000 percent. Assaults on our officers have skyrocketed by over 1,400 percent. One officer in Minnesota had his finger bitten off by a left-wing protestor, egged on by elected officials characterizing our officers as the "gestapo" or "secret police." The families of ICE personnel have been made to feel unsafe in their own homes simply because their loved ones have the courage to enforce the laws passed by this Congress. Notably, those criticizing ICE and encouraging this violence against our officers and their families were silent amid the horrors perpetrated by cartels and human traffickers due to a lack of immigration enforcement under the Biden Administration.

I know this reality firsthand. My own family has been targeted. But let me send a message to anyone who thinks they can intimidate us: You will fail.

The Results of ICE's Increased Immigration Enforcement Operations

Despite these perils, our officers continue to execute their mission with unwavering resolve. And we are only getting started. ICE remains committed to the fundamental principle that those who illegally enter our country must be held accountable.

Since the beginning of the second Trump Administration, we have achieved historic results. From January 20, 2025, through January 20, 2026, ICE conducted nearly 379,000 arrests. Among these arrested were more than 7,300 suspected gang members and 1,400 known or suspected terrorists. We have taken these dangerous individuals off our streets, making our country dramatically safer.

The President tasked us with mass deportations, and we are fulfilling that mandate. Thanks to the resources provided by Congress, we are ramping up detention capacity and removal flights daily. In the last year alone, we conducted over 475,000 removals. We are not just inflating statistics by counting border turnarounds; these are real removals of individuals with no lawful basis to remain in the United States.

Dismantling TCOs and Ending Atrocities Against Children

It is a brutal reality that illegal immigration today is entirely organized by sophisticated, ruthless Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs). This includes the cartels and transnational gangs that President Trump has rightfully designated as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs). For too long, these terrorist groups have effectively controlled our southern border, deciding who enters, what enters, and at what price. These organizations treat human beings as cargo and American laws as mere suggestions. The only way to defeat them is to destroy their revenue stream.

Within Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), our special agents are delivering critical outcomes in the fight against transnational crime. We are seizing fentanyl before it kills our children and dismantling the networks that poison our communities. In FY 2025 alone, we seized more than 2.5 million pounds of narcotics—a 53 percent increase from the previous year and a critical blow to TCO revenues. And, HSI criminal arrests are at their highest point in HSI history.

However, our approach is not just about enforcement; it is about restoring order and dignity to many human beings who have been sold a lie by smugglers and exploited by these TCOs. Nowhere is the mission more urgent, or the history more horrifying, than in the protection of children. We must confront the atrocities that were allowed to fester under the previous Administration. In August 2024, the DHS Office of Inspector General released a report that details a campaign of negligence against the most vulnerable among us.

The report concluded that more than 291,000 Unaccompanied Alien Children (UACs)—out of nearly 450,000 transferred from DHS to the Department of Health and Human Services' custody—were simply "lost" by the system. These children were not just misplaced files; they were human beings abandoned to cartels and traffickers. By failing to issue Notices to Appear or locating minors who missed appearances, the Biden-Harris Administration effectively surrendered them to traffickers and forced labor rings. We are talking about children exploited in factories, abused in illicit sex trades, and living in indentured servitude on American soil. This was a moral stain on our Nation and one of the greatest humanitarian tragedies in our history, fueled by a refusal to enforce the law.

HSI is now leading the charge to find them. We have conducted more than 71,000 field engagements to locate children, verify sponsor legitimacy, and uncover criminal activity related to exploitation and trafficking. These operations have involved comprehensive criminal investigations, intelligence gathering, and close coordination with Federal, state, and local partners to identify fraudulent sponsors, dismantle trafficking networks, and pursue individuals who prey on vulnerable children. Since February 2025, HSI has:

- Arrested over 500 criminal sponsors for offenses including child sexual exploitation, forced labor, identity fraud, immigration violations, and aggravated assault;
- Dismantled more than 2,400 human smuggling operations, including nearly 730 criminal prosecutions related to human smuggling, human trafficking, immigration violations, and child exploitation; and
- Reached 45 million people nationwide through public awareness campaigns focused on preventing child trafficking and sponsor fraud.

Incredibly, under President Trump's leadership, HSI special agents and others within DHS law enforcement and the Department of Health and Human Services have also located more than 145,000 UACs who the Biden Administration lost – many of them exploited, trafficked, and abused.

ICE deportations break the back of the TCO business model that relies on this trafficking and the abuse and neglect of our legal system. When illegal entry no longer serves as a meaningful method to plant operatives in the United States and to transport humans and product across our borders, these criminal networks lose their sources and methods of profit. By removing illegal aliens from the interior and rectifying the Biden Administration's failures, ICE is not just enforcing the law; we are dismantling a machinery of human misery and protecting those who were victimized by criminals taking advantage of the prior Administration's refusal to enforce the law.

Further, through the President's "Project Homecoming" and our Incentivized Voluntary Departure pilot program, we are offering individuals the right to self-deport with dignity. This program allows aliens to return to their home countries on their own terms, without the stigma of a forced removal order. Crucially, by choosing this dignified path, they preserve the chance of coming back to the country the legal way in the future. We are sending a clear message: Do not trust the TCOs with your life. Respect our laws, return home with dignity, and keep the door open to a lawful future.

Homeland Security Task Forces (HSTFs) and Illicit Finance

To further ensure these TCOs can never threaten our Nation again, President Trump directed the establishment of the Homeland Security Task Forces (HSTFs). The HSTFs represent the most aggressive, coordinated attack on TCOs in history. Our mandate is clear: dismantle the FTO-designated cartels and transnational gangs root and branch.

A critical pillar of the HSTF mission is targeting the illicit financing that fuels this violence. Under the direct umbrella of the HSTFs, we have established the Cross-Border Financial Crime Center. This Center is the tip of the spear in our financial war against the TCOs.

Through the Cross-Border Finance Crime Center, we have developed and implemented a targeted strategy to combat rampant fraud involving government programs in Minnesota and across the United States. Using this strategy, HSI has opened numerous criminal investigations into complex fraud schemes that have resulted in the theft of billions of taxpayer dollars. HSI is working side-by-side with federal partners to identify those responsible and aggressively recover hard-earned taxpayer funds. We are cutting off the money, cutting off the supply, and cutting off the leadership. We will not rest until these criminal organizations are destroyed.

Sanctuary Cities

Much of the fight that ICE faces in keeping Americans safe is fueled by so-called "Sanctuary Cities." The concept of a "Sanctuary City" is a dangerous lie. These jurisdictions do not provide sanctuary for immigrants; they provide a shield for criminals. When a local jail refuses to honor an ICE detainer and releases a predator back onto the street, they are not protecting their community – they are endangering it. They are complicit in every future crime that individual commits. We are seeing the impact of these reckless policies in real-time, where innocent

Americans are victimized by individuals who should have been deported. Worse yet, many of these sanctuary jurisdictions provide financial benefits and incentives to these illegal immigrants at the direct expense of the American taxpayer. In our last election, Americans voted unequivocally for support for immigration enforcement. There is no right to obstruct federal law enforcement that the American people voted for by force or by policy, and we will use every tool available to hold these jurisdictions accountable and protect the American people.

Congressional Access to ICE Facilities

We have achieved these outcomes while maintaining transparency. Under President Trump's leadership, and consistent with Secretary Noem's guidance, ICE supported more than triple the annual number of congressional facility visits compared to the past 10 years. As of January 8, 2026, due to the rise in political violence, we are enforcing strict security protocols for these visits to ensure the safety of our staff, the detainees, and Members of Congress themselves, consistent with all court orders.

Even though these visits pull enforcement personnel away from arresting and removing illegal aliens, including dangerous criminals and those with final orders of removal, ICE supported more than 150 such visits between January 20 and September 30, 2025. We stand by our world-class detention operation as we expand it to remove historic numbers of illegal aliens.

ICE Will Continue to Execute Its Longstanding, Statutory Mission

My agency, ICE, exists to enforce America's longstanding immigration and customs laws. These laws are grounded in common sense, national sovereignty, and simple morality. Our officers and agents enforce them without hesitation and without apology.

The men and women of ICE are dedicated, hardworking, and unmatched in their professionalism. They are the shield that protects our communities. I ask that all members of this Committee treat them with the profound respect they have earned.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.



Testimony
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Joseph B. Edlow

Director

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

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Chairman Garbarino, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am here to discuss the progress, priorities, and challenges of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. It is an honor to testify before this esteemed Committee, and I appreciate your continued commitment as we work together to protect American citizens, safeguard the homeland, and uphold the rule of law.

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to President Trump for the trust he has placed in me to lead USCIS, and to Secretary Noem for her leadership at the Department of Homeland Security. I am proud to serve alongside a dedicated workforce committed to advancing the President's agenda, protecting our Nation and the safety of our communities, and restoring integrity to America's legal immigration system.

As Director of USCIS, my vision has been clear: to restore accountability and security to our legal immigration system, ensuring that it serves the interests of the American people above all else. Over the past year, USCIS has made historic strides in advancing this mission. Today, I will highlight our major accomplishments in six critical areas: combating fraud, ending the exploitation of immigration programs, upholding the integrity of the naturalization process, putting American communities and workers first, implementing the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, and protecting our communities from threats to public safety and national security.

Combating Fraud

At the heart of our mission is the unwavering commitment to protect the integrity of the legal immigration system from those who seek to exploit, abuse, or undermine it. Fraud is a national security and public safety concern because its often through fraud that many of those who wish to do us harm have accessed the United States. Over the past year, USCIS has implemented rigorous measures to detect, deter, and disrupt fraud at every stage of the immigration process.

Since January 20, 2025, USCIS officers have made nearly 33,000 fraud referrals to our Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate— a 138% increase compared to the average yearly referrals of the previous administration. Our Fraud Detection and National Security team completed investigations into more than 21,000 cases, identifying fraud in 65% of them. Our officers conducted over 7,000 site visits and more than 26,000 social media checks to identify national security, public safety, fraud, and anti-American concerns.

This year, USCIS made history with Operation Twin Shield. Launched in the Minneapolis–St. Paul area, this targeted initiative uncovered a wide range of fraudulent schemes, including marriage fraud, misuse of H-1B work visas, and student visa abuses. Operation Twin Shield focused on more than 1,000 cases with fraud or ineligibility indicators, attempted over 2,000 site visits, and completed nearly 1,500 in-person interviews. The operation resulted in the denial of immigration benefits, the filing of numerous Notices to Appear before an immigration judge to initiate removal proceedings, and nearly a dozen arrests by our partners at U.S. Immigration and

Customs Enforcement (ICE). We also gained significant evidence that led to Operation PARRIS (Post-Admission Refugee Reverification and Integrity Strengthening) in Minnesota.

Operation PARRIS is a sweeping initiative reexamining thousands of refugee cases through new background checks and intensive verification of refugee claims. We have referred cases of fraud and other crimes to ICE. The initial focus is on Minnesota's 5,600 refugees who have not yet been granted lawful permanent resident status (Green Card holders). USCIS' newly established vetting center is at the forefront of Operation PARRIS, with adjudicators conducting thorough background checks, reinterviews, and merit reviews of refugee claims.

In the last year, USCIS also strengthened policy guidance to ensure that there is no legal defense if someone falsely claims U.S. citizenship to gain a government benefit, with officers considering only age or mental capacity to assess if a claim was made intentionally. Such false claims historically and routinely allow aliens unlawful access to benefits, services, and privileges reserved for American citizens, and we are committed to holding violators accountable. Lying about being a U.S. citizen, including attempting to fraudulently vote in elections, is a clear violation of the INA¹ and will lead to the denial of a naturalization application and the alien's immigration status. We also enhanced screening measures to vet potentially fraudulent marriages and family relationships, ensuring they are genuine, verifiable, and compliant with all applicable laws. Aliens seeking legal immigration status through family relationships or marriage must prove their relationship is genuine and not a scheme to commit immigration fraud.

Additionally, we changed regulations to ensure that aliens no longer receive automatic extensions of employment authorization when seeking to renew that authorization in some employment categories. This ensures that the U.S. Government doesn't allow aliens to work in the U.S. without regular, ongoing screening and vetting. We also reduced the maximum period that certain employment authorization documents are valid — from five years to eighteen months, ensuring more frequent vetting and screening.

Ending the Exploitation of Immigration Programs

USCIS has taken decisive action to end the abuse and exploitation of immigration programs, restoring them to their intended purpose as prescribed by Congress. This includes stopping the broad abuse of humanitarian parole authority and terminating the so-called "family reunification" and the Cuban, Haitian, Nicaraguan, and Venezuelan (CHNV) parole programs.

¹ A false claim to U.S. citizenship is a ground of inadmissibility under INA § 212(a)(6)(C)(ii) and a ground of removability under INA § 237(a)(3)(D), and generally, there is no waiver available.

Parole was never designed to be used as a blanket authority, and we are returning it to the case-by-case basis for only urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit Congress intended.

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) was always meant to be temporary. Secretary Noem has taken her statutory duties seriously and has ended TPS for many countries, restoring the long-ignored Congressional intent of this classification. We strongly encourage aliens whose parole or TPS was terminated to use the CBP Home app to self-report their departure from the United States. Doing so will enable them to receive a complimentary one-way ticket home and a \$2,600 exit bonus to help them get resettled.

Not only were CHNV and TPS never intended to be permanent pathways to citizenship, but they were easily exploited by bad actors. Individuals with criminal records, including those with links to terrorism and human trafficking, obtained status via CHNV and TPS through fraudulent applications and submission of fake documents, including through the filing of Form I-134A (Online Request to be a Supporter and Declaration of Financial Support) associated with CHNV sponsorship applications that identified over 600,000 supporter applications with suspected fraud and public safety concerns involving hundreds of fictitious addresses, fraudulent identities and social security number belonging to deceased individuals, exposing the American people to dangerous threats within our borders. Returning these programs to their statutory intent reduces this risk of exploitation and unacceptable risk to our citizens.

These actions reinforce our commitment to upholding the rule of law and ensuring that immigration programs are not exploited for purposes beyond their statutory intent.

Upholding the Integrity of the Naturalization Process

Naturalization is a privilege, not a right, and USCIS has taken extensive steps to reinforce the integrity of the naturalization process. On September 17, 2025, we announced a revised version of the civics portion of the naturalization test, expanding the total bank of questions from 100 to 128 questions, increasing the number of questions on each test from 10 to 20, raising the passing score from 6 to 12 correct responses, and revising the questions to provide a more meaningful assessment of an alien's knowledge and understanding of U.S. history and government.

We also restored the practice of conducting neighborhood investigations of those seeking citizenship. This is an authority provided for in statute, but long neglected in practice. These investigations verify aliens' eligibility for naturalization by reviewing actual residency, moral character, loyalty to the U.S. Constitution, ensuring they have not falsely claimed U.S. citizenship to obtain an unlawful benefit or registered to vote, and their commitment to the nation's well-being. Neighborhood investigations are vital to maintaining the integrity of the naturalization process, assuring proper assimilation into American values and culture, and safeguarding the value and privilege of American citizenship.

We have also ensured that voter registration services offered at administrative naturalization ceremonies remain strictly nonpartisan and are conducted only by state and local election officials. This practice safeguards the impartiality of voter registration for America's newest citizens.

Putting American Communities and Workers First

USCIS is committed to putting American communities and workers first, ensuring that our immigration system serves the national interest and protects the rights and opportunities of American citizens first and foremost.

We have launched enhancements to the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements service, better known as SAVE, allowing states to verify citizenship using the last four digits of Social Security numbers. States can run queries in bulk and use SAVE at no charge. By allowing states to review and verify their voter rolls, this administration is doing more to ensure the integrity of elections than any previous administration. Since January 20, 2025, SAVE has processed over 58 million voter verification queries, with 27 states signing memoranda of agreement for voter verification with USCIS.

Moreover, we are cracking down on the abuse of public benefits. On September 4, 2025, USCIS reaffirmed long-standing policy that aliens in the United States should be self-reliant, and that government benefits should not incentivize immigration. On September 25, 2025, we reminded individuals who agree to financially sponsor an alien that they can be sued to recover the cost of any benefits accessed by an alien whom they sponsor.

Additionally, DHS proposed a rule to rescind the ineffective 2022 Public Charge final rule and restore USCIS' discretion when making a determination whether an alien seeking legal status in the United States would become reliant upon government assistance. To further preserve public benefits for U.S. citizens who need them and to identify potential fraud in public benefits programs, federal agencies responsible for providing oversight to benefit-granting agencies ran nearly 206 million SAVE queries during Calendar Year 2025.

Another rule that DHS proposed prioritizes the allocation of the limited number of H-1B visas to higher-skilled and higher-paid aliens, better protecting wages, working conditions, and job opportunities for American workers while also ensuring American employers can access the best of the best foreign workers. We also published a critical final rule enabling USCIS to streamline the process for agricultural work visas, supporting America's vital agricultural industry.

Implementing the One Big Beautiful Bill Act

On July 4, 2025, President Trump signed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act into law, adding new provisions and fees to the Immigration and Nationality Act. USCIS did not receive appropriations from the bill, but through the implementation of new immigration fees, \$321 million has been collected – of which USCIS retains only a small portion. The revenue generated

from immigration fees under the bill is allocated to USCIS; the Department of Justice, Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR); the U.S. Treasury; U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP); and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). However, USCIS does not collect or track the revenue for CBP or ICE. USCIS moved quickly to implement the new fees that the agency is responsible for, publishing the July 22, 2025 Federal Register Notice approximately 2 weeks after the President signed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act into law. USCIS has since published several Federal Register Notices announcing the implementation of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act fees.

The bill introduced fees between \$100 to \$1,000 for specific USCIS benefit requests with limited exceptions. Congress designated portions of each fee to specific government entities, with USCIS retaining only 26%, and the remainder allocated to the United States Treasury. Fees mandated by the bill are non-waivable and non-reducible, regardless of eligibility for waivers under other USCIS regulations. The law requires DHS to make annual adjustments based on the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers to ensure fees reflect inflation and economic conditions. On January 1, 2026, USCIS implemented inflation-adjusted fees, in compliance with the law.

We also updated our policies, guidance, and intake procedures to close loopholes, limit improper fee waivers, and ensure applications that do not comply with the law are rejected. These critical efforts have strengthened the integrity of our legal immigration system, reinforced accountability, and ensured that USCIS resources are directed toward lawful, properly filed cases. Under this administration, USCIS is once again enforcing the law as written: firmly, consistently, and with integrity. I'm proud of the professionalism and discipline our workforce has shown in carrying out Congress's mandate.

Protecting American Communities from Threats to Public Safety and National Security

Protecting Americans is at the heart of everything we do at USCIS. We are committed to safeguarding public safety and national security by ensuring that every alien undergoes the most rigorous vetting and screening processes possible.

Within hours of the November 26, 2025 attack where an Afghan national allegedly murdered a National Guard member and severely wounded another in Washington, D.C., Secretary Noem directed USCIS to put asylum processing on hold for aliens from every country, implement a full-scale re-review of immigration benefits approved for aliens from Presidentially-designated high-risk countries for the last several years, and place a hold on the processing of immigration applications and petitions for Afghan nationals and aliens from those additional countries of concern.

We implemented critical national security measures requiring USCIS officers to consider negative country-specific factors when vetting aliens from 39 high-risk countries, ensuring that

USCIS can more meaningfully assess whether an alien is potentially a threat to public safety or national security.

With the support of Secretary Noem, USCIS announced the creation of a new vetting center to enhance screening and vetting of immigration applications, with resources that allow us to better focus on identifying terrorists, criminal aliens, and other threats to public safety. The center leverages advanced technologies and works closely with law enforcement and intelligence partners to strengthen our ability to protect national security.

USCIS has referred over 14,400 aliens to ICE since January 20, 2025, for public safety, national security, and fraud concerns, including 182 aliens who were confirmed or suspected to be national security risks. We have actively collaborated with other agencies on immigration enforcement and public safety efforts, resulting in over 2,400 arrests at USCIS field offices since January 20, 2025.

USCIS has begun recruiting a new class of immigration officers called Homeland Defenders to better support the agency's mission and bolster efforts to combat fraud and other threats. Since launching the hiring campaign on September 30, USCIS has received more than 50,000 applications—the highest in agency history. The first Homeland Defenders began reporting for duty in early December 2025.

USCIS is also exercising new law enforcement authorities delegated by Secretary Noem and is hiring a new team of special agents who will investigate and refer immigration law violators for prosecution.

Additionally, under an updated policy confirming USCIS' role as an immigration enforcement agency, our immigration officers are once again empowered to enforce immigration law by issuing Notices to Appear before an immigration judge to initiate removal proceedings, and they have done so in historic numbers. Since January 20, 2025, USCIS officers have issued approximately 196,600 Notices to Appear.

USCIS has aligned immigration policy with our deeply held American values, issuing policy guidance emphasizing that there is no room in America for aliens who espouse anti-American ideologies or support terrorist organizations.

We have also launched an online process for aliens to comply with a longstanding alien registration requirement that helps the government track and manage their presence to more effectively enforce immigration law, supporting national security and public safety efforts.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to reiterate my commitment—and the commitment of every USCIS employee—to restoring integrity, accountability, and security to America's legal immigration system. The accomplishments of the past year reflect the hard work and dedication of our

workforce, the leadership of President Trump and Secretary Noem, and our shared commitment to putting the interests of the American people first.

USCIS stands ready to continue working with Congress and our partners across government to protect the homeland, uphold the rule of law, and ensure that our legal immigration system serves the nation's interests. I thank the Committee for its attention to our shared mission and for its ongoing support of USCIS.

I welcome your questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.