



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

STATEMENT

OF

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REGARDING A HEARING ON

*“Fiscal Year 2025 Request for the U.S. Immigration and Customs
Enforcement Agency”*

BEFORE THE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

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Introduction

Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Cuellar, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Homeland Security.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is exceedingly proud of its entire workforce for their dedication to the agency's responsibilities to the American public, which include immigration enforcement within the U.S. interior, investigation of a broad range of federal crimes, and protecting the United States from public safety and national security threats while maintaining a culture of integrity, courage, and excellence. I am extremely proud to serve beside ICE's over 20,000-person workforce and am thankful for the opportunity to highlight their work and its impacts on national security and public safety.

ICE continues to prove it can implement and execute highly impactful programs that strengthen national security and public safety. On behalf of ICE's workforce, I thank you for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, which lays the groundwork for ICE to build on its most pressing missions.

I look forward to discussing the state of ICE operations, the ever-changing domestic and international criminal environment, and our efforts to remain agile and forward-leaning as the threat landscape shifts. I also intend to highlight our continued efforts to make the most efficient and effective use of resources as we execute our vital homeland security mission.

Homeland Security Investigations

Because of its unique authorities and footprint, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) is the federal law enforcement agency best positioned to investigate and dismantle transnational criminal organizations.

HSI has unique legal authority to conduct federal criminal investigations into illegal cross-border movement of people, goods, money, technology, and other contraband. It uses these authorities to investigate a range of transnational crime and violations of customs and immigration laws, including money laundering, financial fraud; cybercrime; export control and evasion; intellectual property theft and trade fraud; narcotics smuggling; transnational gang activity; online child sexual exploitation and abuse; human smuggling; human trafficking; identity and benefit fraud; human rights violations, war crimes; and terrorism.

HSI's workforce comprises more than 8,700 special agents, criminal analysts, and mission support personnel assigned to 200 cities across the United States and more than 90 locations in 55 countries abroad. HSI's international presence represents the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) largest investigative law enforcement presence abroad, and it is one of the largest international footprints in U.S. law enforcement. HSI leverages more than 4,000 task force officers with federal, state, tribal, and local partners as a force multiplier to accomplish its mission.

The President's FY 2025 budget requests \$2.5 billion for HSI to continue to identify, disrupt, and dismantle transnational networks engaged in criminal acts involving financial crime;

cyber and emerging technologies; national security; opioids, their precursors, and synthetic drugs such as fentanyl; human exploitation and victimization; and global trade. Of these focus areas, fentanyl is one of our nation's most urgent and lethal threats. HSI continues to carry out its Strategy for Combating Illicit Opioids, leveraging its criminal, civil, and administrative criminal law enforcement authorities to attack fentanyl supply chains and distribution networks. This comprehensive strategy includes prioritizing and targeting darknet vendors and other cyber-enabled actors that distribute fentanyl on the internet, planning additional surges of personnel to support national initiatives and local field office priority fentanyl investigations, and increasing joint operations with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at and between Ports of Entry.

HSI continues to advance its expertise in utilizing cyber tools and resources to combat these transnational criminal organizations and illicit actors. HSI leads the DHS Cyber Crimes Center, or C3, which specializes in the developing a skilled cyber workforce to enhance the technical capabilities to combat sophisticated transnational criminal organizations. C3 collaborates with subject-matter experts to increase the cyber workforce's knowledge of current tactics and trends. Innovative techniques—such as virtual environments—allow HSI to enhance these cyber skillsets and amplify investigations using complex cyber techniques including encrypted communications, the dark web, and illicit cryptocurrency payment networks. The DHS C3 continues to lead coordination and cooperation across the Department against cyber threats.

The FY 2025 budget includes \$6 million for HSI to further develop the Repository for Analytics in a Virtualized Environment (RAVEN) artificial intelligence capabilities to improve investigative efficiency, increase data-driven practices, expand capabilities, and enhance public safety. The Innovation Lab is HSI's centralized hub for the development of advanced investigative analytics and tools for special agents, criminal analysts, and task force officers. During FY 2025, HSI plans to build on RAVEN's capabilities to improve collaboration among users, enabling HSI to share real-time updates, search across multiple data sources, and visualize large datasets.

The budget includes an increase of \$10.8 million—including six positions—for the Center for Countering Human Trafficking (CCHT) to counter domestic and international human trafficking. The CCHT's mission aligns DHS's capabilities and expertise to advance human trafficking law enforcement operations, to protect victims, and to enhance prevention efforts. In FY 2025, the CCHT plans to conduct a DHS-wide analysis to identify gaps in human trafficking-related training and will propose solutions. The funding will provide contract support and technology experts to conduct DHS-wide needs assessments, automate systems and processes by modernizing the Continued Presence (CP) system.

In support of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, the FY 2025 budget provides \$5.6 million to support 20 positions to enable ICE to hire 10 special agents assigned to the CCHT, eight special agents assigned to Global Trade Investigations, and two special agents assigned overseas to investigate forced labor cases emanating from the China's Uyghur Autonomous Region. These new positions will help ensure HSI is positioned to support CBP inspections and to conduct large-scale investigations against entities and individuals that knowingly benefit from importation of goods produced with forced labor from China.

The FY 2025 budget also includes \$20.7 million to support 35 positions to continue building HSI's capability to investigate international and domestic child sexual exploitation and abuse cases. HSI's Child Exploitation Investigations Unit (CEIU) will use these resources to focus on new and emerging threats, and develop an online undercover program to ensure HSI is using all available tools to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse around the globe. The CEIU employs the latest technology to identify victims, collect evidence, and track activities of predators and organized groups that sexually exploit children using the open internet, the darknet, chat rooms, peer-to-peer trading, social media-based platforms, and other app-based platforms.

The HSI Victim Assistance Program (VAP) is a central piece of HSI's victim-centered approach to support victims of crime, trafficking, and exploitation. The VAP treats victims with dignity and respect when responding to a wide range of federal crimes, including human trafficking, child sexual exploitation and abuse, child sex tourism, financial scams targeting the elderly and other vulnerable populations, white collar crime, and human rights abuses. The FY 2025 budget provides the VAP with an additional 55 positions and \$16 million to expand to 25 additional domestic offices and develop a single, comprehensive data management system to significantly improve data quality and accuracy.

The VAP is critical to HSI investigations and criminal prosecutions. It helps ensure victims understand their rights, have access to services they are entitled to by law, and get the help they need to participate actively and fully in the criminal justice process. The program develops and maintains policy concerning victim-related issues and provides special agents with training and technical assistance. The VAP also supports domestic and international training to increase visibility of victim-centered approach practices during investigations and promote bilateral collaboration between HSI and foreign partners.

Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO)

ERO's mission is to protect the homeland through the arrest, detention, and removal of noncitizens who undermine the safety of U.S. communities and the integrity of the U.S. immigration system. ERO's more than 7,600 law enforcement and non-law enforcement support personnel are spread across 25 domestic field offices and 178 locations nationwide, as well as 32 overseas postings. ERO's primary areas of focus are interior enforcement operations, management of the agency's detained and non-detained populations, and removal efforts.

ERO is an interior enforcement agency but encounters at the Southwest Border drive resource requirements. Noncitizens generally may spend up to several days in CBP custody, but remain on ERO's docket for years until they are provided immigration relief, protection from removal, or are removed. In addition, ERO continues to provide personnel, logistical support, and Alternatives to Detention (ATD) technology to help manage irregular migration at the Southwest Border. The FY 2025 budget of \$4.9 billion echoes priorities consistent with this administration's focus to ensure a safe, humane, and orderly immigration system.

The FY 2025 budget includes \$3.3 billion for ERO's Custody Operations, including 48 new positions, which oversees the immigration detention system and manages cases of detained noncitizens undergoing immigration proceedings. The FY 2025 budget includes 34,000 adult detention beds in our base to support detention of threats to public safety, national security, and

border security. The budget also includes funding that may be used for additional detention beds through the Southwest Border Contingency Fund.

The FY 2025 budget includes nearly \$360 million for ICE's ATD program. ATD uses technology, case management, and other tools to manage noncitizens' compliance with release conditions while they are on ICE's non-detained docket. The FY 2025 budget supports over 100,000 ATD participants. ICE will focus its ATD resources on those noncitizens in most need to case management services, while the Southwest Border Contingency Fund may provide for expanded enrollment capacity in support of emergent requirements.

The FY 2025 budget also includes \$648.6 million for ERO's Transportation and Removal Program (TRP) to fund domestic and international travel requirements using air charter flights, commercial flights, and ground transportation. Over the past several years, ICE experienced increased demands on its air and ground transportation services. Commercial and charter flight services continue to increase, and ground transportation costs are increasing as a direct result of Southwest Border decompression efforts and the requirement that ICE relocate noncitizens in custody between detention centers. An increase in TRP funding allows ERO to better accommodate migrant surges at the Southwest Border resulting in a significantly increased need for transportation movements.

Office of the Principal Legal Advisor (OPLA)

With over 1,700 attorneys and 450 support personnel, OPLA is the largest legal program in the Department and one of the largest law offices in the nation. OPLA attorneys advise ICE personnel on a wide range of matters, including criminal, administrative, and civil customs and immigration laws and authorities, and provide critical legal guidance to ICE's operational components. OPLA serves as the federal government's exclusive representative in removal proceedings before the Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR).

We greatly appreciate your help adding 341 new attorney and support positions in the FY 2023 appropriation and welcome additional support to address the increasing staffing disparity between OPLA and EOIR. At the end of FY 2023, the disparity between OPLA attorneys and EOIR judges is 667 personnel, 484 attorneys and 183 support staff. In FY 2024, the Administration requested approximately \$300 million in supplemental funding to provide additional attorneys and support staff to close this gap.

In FY 2023, OPLA represented DHS in 1.3 million removal hearings before EOIR. OPLA also supported the completion of over 460,000 cases, including 49,000 orders of relief, 217,500 removal orders, and 84,000 dismissals in the exercise of prosecutorial discretion while managing more than 1,800 human rights violator cases and over 4,000 national security cases nationwide.

Mission Support

ICE's Mission Support workforce serves a critical role in ICE's ability to meet our national security and public safety missions. These dedicated professionals address the agency's diverse operational needs, including hiring, financial management, information technology, acquisition and procurement, policy, strategic planning, leadership, and career development

training. Mission Support coordinates and implements ICE administrative and managerial functions to support and advance every aspect of the agency's mission.

Our FY 2025 budget includes \$8.7 million for the Office of Firearms and Tactical Programs for the acquisition and management of 1,600 additional body-worn cameras and 1,925 additional licenses, doubling our existing inventory of devices and licenses in the field.

The FY 2025 budget will fund \$4.5 million for the Consolidated ICE Financial Solution (CIFS) Program to support the DHS Financial Systems Modernization (FSM) Program's mission, goals and objectives. CIFS is an essential part of the DHS FSM initiative that will streamline financial operations, as it is the keystone to ICE's financial systems modernization. ICE is transitioning to an integrated financial management solution that standardizes business processes to eliminate duplication and inefficiencies, delivers more robust automated financial reporting, complies with federal requirements and guidelines, and provides a fully automated, integrated, and streamlined core financial system.

The FY 2025 budget also includes \$5 million and 37 positions for the Office of Human Capital (OHC) to address current and future hiring demands and to effectively support recruitment and retention. The additional resources will reduce time to hire for mission critical positions and improve ICE's ability to execute its national security mission.

Conclusion

Thank you again for inviting me to testify today. I am honored and humbled to represent ICE employees who work so hard to serve the American public. I look forward to your questions.