

HELENA MORENO
MAYOR

Testimony of Mayor Helena Moreno, City of New Orleans

Before

U.S. House of Representative Committee on Homeland Security Democrats

“Unmasking the Truth: How Trump’s Immigration Raids Target U.S. Citizens and Terrorize
Communities”

January 26, 2026

Good morning, Ranking Member Thompson, Congressman Carter, and the rest of the committee members. I’m honored to have you in the city of New Orleans.

You have asked for testimony regarding Border Patrol operations in New Orleans and our region, in particular the operation called Catahoula Crunch. I want to make clear that I have received no direct information from Border Patrol, and they have kept me and city leadership in the dark, except for information we have received from Department of Homeland Security news releases. What we know is that the operation began in early December. News releases from the Department of Homeland Security described the operation as targeting the “worst of the worst offenders in the New Orleans area.”

Despite these constant claims by DHS and Border Patrol, what we witnessed has not been the case. What we have witnessed is nonviolent individuals being overwhelmingly targeted and profiled. Across our city and region, teams of agents were deployed to profile, question, and round up predominantly Hispanic individuals. Countless stories were reported by local media of Hispanic individuals, including some who are American citizens, being questioned, chased, and detained. This has caused widespread fear throughout our city and region. Parents took their kids out of school, workers stopped showing up at their jobs, and at my church, where we have a large Spanish-speaking service, people stopped coming to worship.

It should be noted that in New Orleans we are seeing historic reductions in violent crime due to investments in crime prevention and the work of our NOPD and partners. In fact, the homicide rate is the lowest it has been in 50 years. I support taking murderers, shooters, rapists and violent offenders off our streets. But as I mentioned before, it became very clear from the start of Catahoula Crunch that the mode of operation was for agents to find and target groups of predominately Hispanic individuals and then figure out who they were later. The numbers released by assistant secretary of DHS Tricia McLaughlin on January 9 (reported in local news), claimed Operation Catahoula Crunch had made over 560 arrests, once again claiming to nab the “worst of the worst” yet only 6% of those arrested had any type of criminal record.

On December 5th, I held a news conference with community advocates, the New Orleans City Council, Congressman Troy Carter, and National Urban League President and former Mayor of New Orleans, Marc Morial, to address Border Patrol actions during Catahoula Crunch.

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At that time, we stated that federal operations in our city had to be conducted transparently, constitutionally, and with respect for local residents. We emphasized that public safety, the protection of people's rights, and maintaining trust between the government and the community were our top priorities.

As a collective, we made several demands. We called for regular public reporting on stops, detentions, warrants, and civil-rights compliance. We demanded strong due process protections, including access to legal representation and no detentions without proper warrants or probable cause. We requested that federal agents be clearly identifiable, uniformed, and unmasked to avoid confusion and protect public safety.

We also demanded safeguards against discriminatory enforcement and requested demographic data to ensure individuals were not targeted based on race, ethnicity, national origin, language, or perceived immigration status. Finally, we emphasized the need for humane treatment, including access to medical care, language interpretation, and family notification for anyone detained.

I also penned a letter to Border Patrol Commander Gregory Bovino emphasizing the need for communication, transparency, and upholding constitutional rights. I never directly received a response to my letter, but as Bovino walked through the nearby city of Kenner with masked agents, he was asked by a reporter about my demands, and his response was, "This is as transparent as it gets."

Ladies and gentlemen, what we saw here...and now, in much more severe fashion, in Minneapolis...is no longer an issue of immigration, public safety or even politics. This is a cruel divisive agenda lacking humanity. Overwhelmingly, the people of America question what these ICE agents are even doing, except creating chaos, ignoring the constitution and costing lives. Close to two-thirds of this country now believes ICE enforcement has gone too far. I am hearing from people on the left and the right who say this is un-American. I am the first Hispanic mayor of the city of New Orleans, I was born in Mexico to an American mother and my father is originally from Mexico. I am an American by birth and here to tell you that what actually makes America great is our different cultures, backgrounds and diversity. Do we need comprehensive immigration reform, yes we do. It's complicated, it's not easy, but we ask you to take on this work. We need a path for those who are doing the right thing and hard-working members of society to gain citizenship. These are our neighbors, workers, friends who often due to difficult and complicated circumstances are undocumented. As members of Congress, I ask you work on this type of reform, but more than anything now...we need you to step up, intervene, and hold ICE and Border Patrol accountable.