

***Testimony of Constance Slaughter-Harvey, President/Founder of
Legal Education and Community Empowerment Foundation, Inc.***

Before the House Committee on Homeland Security

***“Immigration Raids: Impact and Aftermath on Mississippi
Communities”***

November 7, 2019

My name is Constance Slaughter-Harvey, and I am Founder and President of the Legacy Education and Community Empowerment Foundation, Inc. in Forest, Scott County, Mississippi. Our mission is to empower our children and families in order to empower our communities. I also serve as Scott County Youth Court Prosecutor. In that capacity, I represent the MS Department of Child Protection Services.

As a native and life-long citizen of Mississippi, I have seen changes in the political and legal arenas. My heart ached when I witnessed African Americans beaten and degraded for exercising basic rights as Americans. Shortly after my graduation from the University of Mississippi (Ole MS) School of Law in 1970, I filed many lawsuits on behalf of victims and their families for brutality, beatings and even death inflicted at the hands of police officers and other law enforcement personnel. While we were not successful in many of those legal actions, I always hoped we served notice on the law enforcement systems. In recent years, it seems the notice was apparently not received.

On the morning of August 8, 2019, I sensed that our past efforts had been in vain when hundreds of persons were thrown to the ground, handcuffed, and arrested with no notice as to why they were being arrested. According to several friends who were arrested and detained

and later released, as well as friends whose family members are detained in Natchez and Jenner, they were not informed of the charges against them when they were forcibly removed from their employment. Most were not informed of charges until their court appearances weeks later. This procedure runs contrary to our legal guarantees.

Not only were the immigrants surprised and caught off guard, most in the Forest and Morton communities of Scott County were surprised and disturbed. The manner in which the raid was conducted was appalling and inhumane. The poultry workers were treated as terrorist and animals. Local law enforcement officials were unaware of the raids and many expressed disappointment with the lack of notice.

When I first learned of the ICE raids, my heart dropped as I felt heat on my nose. I contacted CPS officials who had been contacted by the local schools regarding children whose parents were arrested. I was also advised that none of the CPS staff was alerted by their supervisors until later that night when CPS workers were contacted to come to a local facility to check on children whose parents were arrested and detained. When they arrived, there were several children who were being care for by relatives.

The following day, I was contacted by relatives of Legacy Change Agents who are enrolled in Legacy's Mentoring Programs. They asked that I meet with them to console the minors. When I arrived, they rushed up and hugged my neck, and asked if their parents were going to be sent away. Several of these Legacy children are still disturbed because their fathers remain in detention. Others are crying that their fathers will not ever return. Two mothers of our Legacy Change Agents were arrested and later returned to the plant. They wore leg monitors and the children remain fearful that their mothers will be taken away again.

The initial reaction from the local communities in Scott County was shock and concern for the children whose parents were arrested without having an opportunity to arrange for the care of their children. Regardless of political persuasion, most residents were uncomfortable with the process. While many expressed they did not support immigrants breaking the law, they felt that many had been in Scott County and Mississippi for more than 10 years, and had become a vital and contributing part of our community. The children are integral members of the school families and have relationships with other students who are not immigrants. They are leaders in the academics, sports and other school activities. They have become a part of our community fabric and make contributions in all walks of life. In fact, my grandson's friend's mother was arrested. Tears were shed by both of these youth. Even at early ages, they question the motives of officials orchestrating the raids. My heart aches to see these youth affected to the extent they may lose hope for a future where justice and fairness are extended to all persons.

At least 200 members of our church community, St. Michael's Catholic Church, remain in jail as a result of the raids. The vast majority of our parish membership is Hispanic and their absence is visible in all facets of the church's operations. Many of these parishioners work long and hard to support the church as well as the local economy. They, along with other immigrants, carry their loads in our towns and contribute significantly to our local economy. The raids have affected the local economy and the absence of workers and their financial investments are quite noticeable.

The local churches and organizations immediately responded to the crisis following the arrest of detainee family members. The United Methodist Church was among the first to respond and was joined by other churches and missions. The Food Network in Morton, St. Michael's,

and the Baptist Association have also been instrumental in providing assistance. The United Methodist Trinity Mission continues to provide humanitarian assistance with distribution of food, donated by various organizations and persons, and payment of utilities and rent. The community support has decreased slightly over time but there are several churches and organizations that continue to provide assistance.

We have been fortunate to have legal assistance from local and out-of-state lawyers. Legal assistance clinics were held at Legacy's office, Trinity Mission, St. Michael's and San Martin's Catholic Churches. Many detainees arrested during these raids have had initial court appearances in federal court, including the Legacy Change Agents and their families. Legal assistance is being provided and coordinated through the MS Center for Justice and other legal entities.

There are many questions posed by our community residents concerning the timing of the raids, the secrecy of the raids, the lack of planning and coordinating these actions, and the lack of compassion for the children whose families have been destroyed. Additional concerns are the lack of prosecution of employers who hired the immigrants without checking their citizenship status, and the failure to provide detainees with notice as to the specific criminal charges.

Unfortunately, the efforts to terrorize Hispanic immigrants have been successful and the majority, some of whom have their papers and are legal, remain intimidated.

These raids disrupted many lives in our communities. In fact, many families have been destroyed and may never recover. I am saddened for our children that this type gestapo action has returned to our state. What a shaming indictment.