



Statement of the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (ILAP)

Submitted for the Congressional Field Hearing:

“Seeking Justice in Biddeford:

Oversight of ICE’s Use of Force in the Death of Johan Sebastián Durán Guerrero”

August 17, 2026, in Biddeford, Maine

Good morning, Ranking Member Thompson, Representative Pingree, Representative Clark, Representative Carter, and other Honorable Members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

My name is Sue Roche, and I am the Executive Director of the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project, or ILAP. ILAP is Maine’s only statewide immigration legal services organization. For more than 30 years, we have ensured that Maine people can access immigration legal help, no matter how much money they have in their pocket.

Johan Sebastián’s death is a devastating tragedy, felt by his family, the Biddeford community, and all of Maine. It is also not an isolated incident, and it was not an accident. It is the direct and foreseeable result of deliberate federal policy choices, rooted in racism and dehumanization.

As the only organization of our kind in the state, with decades of experience, ILAP has been able to uniquely document ICE and Border Patrol activity and the unprecedented patterns of immigration enforcement that have been happening in Maine since early 2025. I have personally been with ILAP for 26 years, joining as its first staff attorney in 2000, and have never seen anything like this.

In 2025, enforcement patterns included high levels of collaboration between ICE, Border Patrol, and Maine’s law enforcement. This typically involved Maine’s state and local law enforcement calling immigration officers to minor or pretextual traffic stops, where they would arrest Maine residents and workers. We also documented incidents where people in car accidents were taken by immigration officers, and where people were taken after they called 911 for help. None of this made Maine safe. It left community members living in terror, while draining our state’s limited resources.

In January 2026, ICE descended on Maine in an operation they grotesquely called “Catch of the Day,” comparing the people of Maine to fish they could catch in a net. In a few days, hundreds were ripped from their families, communities, and Maine’s workforce. ILAP responded to more than 70 requests for emergency legal help. We documented rampant racial profiling, ICE smashing windows and snatching people from their cars and off sidewalks, stalking schools and grocery stores, arresting people at gunpoint, and other terrorizing and brutal behavior.

ICE's violent tactics – let alone use of deadly force – are unacceptable regardless of a person's immigration status. No one should lose their life or have their family member killed because they are an immigrant. This being said, ILAP has observed that the majority of Maine residents and workers who have been taken by ICE and Border Patrol since early 2025 were in lawful immigration processes with no criminal background. This was the case with Johan Sebastián. He was a young father on his way to work. He was following a lawful process under U.S. law. We have reviewed documents provided by his family and have confirmed that he had a pending asylum application and was authorized to work in this country. He was following all the rules and going about a normal day when he was suddenly and viciously killed by ICE.

Since the January operation, there have been ongoing high levels of ICE activity in Maine, with a particular targeting of asylum seekers. ILAP is responding to arrests every day, and has so far received approximately 350 requests for help in our Detention Project in 2026.

ILAP's clients are not only afraid of being detained and deported, they are also afraid to send their children to school, attend medical appointments, seek higher education, apply for new jobs, report crimes, and serve as witnesses. Everyone in Maine is harmed – and our state's entire future is dimmed – when so many members of our communities are living in fear and unable to participate in public life.

While we look to Johan Sebastián's family to tell us what some measure of justice looks like to them, some things are clear:

- First, the administration's mass deportation agenda has no legitimate public policy purpose and harms all of us.
- Second, ICE is an imminent public safety threat and must get out of our communities now. The billions of dollars that have been appropriated to immigration enforcement are wholly unjustifiable. Congress should take all steps to defund and dismantle ICE and put those taxpayer dollars towards the public good.
- Finally, a just and humane immigration system is possible. Millions were left vulnerable to this extremist administration, and Congress must not delay anymore in creating a pathway to citizenship for all who call the United States home.

Thank you for your crucial oversight work to hold ICE accountable for killing our beloved community member, Johan Sebastián. I look forward to your questions and ILAP is here to be a resource in the work ahead.

For additional information or questions, please contact Lisa Parisio, ILAP's Policy Director at lparisio@ilapmaine.org.