

**Ranking Member Kathleen Rice Opening Statement
Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee**

**Field Hearing
“Combating Gang Violence on Long Island: Shutting Down the MS-13
Pipeline”**

**Tuesday, June 20, 2017
Alfonse M. D’Amato U.S. Courthouse
100 Federal Plaza, Central Islip, New York**

We are fortunate to have two diverse panels of witnesses with unique perspectives and insights on how we can both combat gang violence on Long Island, on the one hand, and on the other, empower young people with the knowledge, support and resources they need to reject gangs in their communities.

We’re here today to examine a very real and serious threat to public safety on Long Island. MS-13 and their rival gangs are criminal organizations who commit brutal acts of violence and have taken too many lives to name in the few minutes I have for this statement. They are organizations that revel in violence, crave fear, and terrorize the communities in which they live and operate and recruit their members.

Many of the members of MS-13 are, in fact, immigrants and children and descendants of immigrants. And over the past few months, it has seemed to me that President Trump and Attorney General Sessions have sought to use the threat of MS-13 to justify their push to build a wall on the southern border and round up and deport millions of immigrants – including those whose only crime is being in this country without paperwork.

This is not the time or the place to debate those policies. But I bring it up only to say that what too often gets lost in this highly charged and divisive debate is the fact that many if not most of MS-13’s victims are also immigrants. The families who fear that their son might be targeted by or pressured to join MS-13 are immigrant families. The communities that are terrorized by MS-13 are often immigrant communities. And I think it is safe to say that immigrants want these gangs to be dismantled and brought to justice as much as anyone else, if not more.

As the former Nassau County District Attorney, I’ve seen firsthand how vicious and unrepentant these gangs are. I’ve seen MS-13 members laugh at the judge as they were sentenced to life in prison or deportation.

I believe all violent criminals should be punished to the full extent of the law. I believe that violent criminals who are in this country illegally should be deported and prevented from ever coming back. I believe that dismantling violent criminal organizations like MS-13 must be a priority for law enforcement officials and lawmakers at all levels.

I also know for a fact that the vast majority of immigrants in this country are not criminals – they are in fact more likely to be the victims of crime than the perpetrators. And I know that you cannot take on a gang like MS-13 without the help of immigrant communities. You need members of the community to talk to you, provide information, report crimes – and for that, they need to trust you.

They need to know that stepping forward to help will not lead to them being detained and deported and ripped away from their families.

I have met with many immigrants in my district over the past six months – documented and undocumented – and there is a very real and palpable sense of fear right now in Long Island’s immigrant communities. I’m concerned that this sense of fear and alienation, first of all, may make immigrants – particularly young immigrants – more vulnerable to be targeted by MS-13 for protection and recruitment purposes. And second, could make immigrants less likely to cooperate with authorities – both of which would significantly undermine our efforts to eliminate gangs like MS-13 from our communities. I would appreciate any thoughts or insight our witnesses can provide about those concerns.

I would like to thank all of our law enforcement witnesses on the first panel and congratulate you for the successful operation last week that resulted in the arrest of 39 MS-13 members and affiliates, as well as six members of other street gangs.

Finally, I want to offer my condolences to Ms. Rodriguez and Mr. Mickens and thank you for having the courage to testify today.

And I want to thank all the witnesses on our second panel for the critical work that you do – whether helping prevent young people from joining gangs like MS-13, or being a voice for our immigrant communities. I know your work as parents, activists, and educators may seem to go unnoticed at times, but I assure you we are aware and truly grateful for your efforts.