Dear Committee on the Judiciary:

Thank you for holding a hearing about Community Safety Concerns following on the events of March 11, 2026. I was present that day from 9:00 until 10:45, and again from 4:00 until 7:00. I am a Burlington resident since 1994, and have participated in innumerable peaceful protests for almost six decades. I also spent thirteen years researching and writing a book about the Dutch resistance to the Nazis, so the topic of police collaboration with outside authorities is intimately familiar to me.

Most people in Vermont agree that ICE mismanaged the situation badly. Despite the repeated advice of local authorities, they persisted in breaking into the house over the objections of hundreds of people, and hauled away three people not named in the warrant and against whom there were no criminal charges. They involved 50 or 60 law enforcement officers and dozens of vehicles so they could remove three random people from their home at enormous financial and human cost; the person they were seeking is still at large.

We can all be proud of the performance of South Burlington school officials that day, and not enough has been done to recognize and honor them for removing a pre-school child from an obviously dangerous situation which no child should ever have to face. I hope the Legislature will remedy that with a commendation of some kind. Monica Desrochers in particular initiated the actions that led to the safety of the child.

What concerns me most is the role of our own local and State police in facilitating ICE's work. I observed the South Burlington police behaving with great restraint in the morning, even when a few protestors insulted them. They were in a genuinely difficult situation. I have heard the detailed testimony about the South Burlington Police Chief Breault's assessment was that ICE was going to proceed regardless, and that they would bring in whatever force was necessary to break into the house and remove the accused criminal they thought was hiding there. The Chief knew an ever larger crowd would attempt to prevent that. So, in his view, it was in the interests of public safety to call in other police from the area as well as state troopers, with the goal of keeping ICE apart from the protestors.

Sadly, in my view, the increased police presence did not calm things down, but escalated the situation considerably, and in the end created a situation where state and local officials actively aided in the abduction of three local residents without a warrant for their arrest. By the time I returned at 4:00, dozens of state police and vehicles had arrived, and the whole scene had deteriorated a great deal. ICE had returned with the judicial warrant, and had broken into the house. One of their officers guarded the door, but to my horror the distinctive green hats of Vermont State troopers made a line to the waiting ICE vehicle. Witnesses told me the troopers who had cleared away the protestors who were blocking the entrance with linked arms. For me, that crossed a line, and sent me back to Anne Frank's Amsterdam. Willi Lages, a Nazi official, said "It would have been practically impossible to seize even ten percent of Dutch Jewry without them [meaning the Dutch police]." The result was that almost 75% of the Jewish people in the Netherlands were rounded up and murdered.

Even if a case can be made for bringing this huge police presence into a quiet neighborhood in South Burlington, at some point the State Police stopped protecting the citizens and began collaborating with ICE. Chief Breaux would probably say that the situation would have been even worse if ICE had been allowed to come in in force. That may be true. But it is still not the job of our local or state police to collude in the removal of people from their home when there are no criminal charges against them. The Fourth Amendment states "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."

History will not be kind to those who collaborate with the crimes which are being committed against Vermont residents in the name of the Federal government.

I will leave it to others to document in detail the allegations of excessive force against local and state officials. Undoubtedly a small percentage of protestors were cursing and throwing things, especially toward the end of the day. But well trained officers know how to de-escalate such situations rather than react with violence. And there are no circumstances under which any law enforcement officer should ever be

witnessed to say “I’m going to break your fingers” to someone who is committing civil disobedience, and then choke someone at all, much less to the point of unconsciousness. We might have had a tragedy on our hands had there not been a nurse present. (This is from testimony at the South Burlington City Council.)

When the history of this time is written, let’s make Vermont one of the places that drew the line. Let’s do everything we can to set an example as a state where community is strong, and we don’t let anybody take our neighbors away when they are not charged with a crime. Even if the orders come all the way from Washington.

Sincerely,

Mary Fillmore