Nate Biscotti

From: Testimony
Sent: Tuesday, March 31, 2026 11:07 AM
To: Karen Johnston
Subject: RE: [External] for Tuesday's public hearing on ICE incursion on March 11

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Thank you, Karen. This has been received and will be posted to the Judiciary Committee pages.

Best,
Megan

Megan Cannella | she/her
Supervisor of Committee Services
Senate Transportation Committee, Room 3
Office of Legislative Counsel
Vermont General Assembly

Attention Witnesses: If you have documents to accompany testimony, please submit as a PDF at least 24 hours in advance of your scheduled testimony. Should you require accessibility services, please click here and note that requests should be made 48 hours in advance of testimony.
First time testifying? See Information for Witnesses here.

From: Karen Johnston <revkaren@uusociety.org>
Sent: Tuesday, March 31, 2026 8:20 AM
To: Testimony <testimony@vtleg.gov>
Subject: [External] for Tuesday's public hearing on ICE incursion on March 11

[External]

In my role as clergy, I was present at the Dorset Street ICE incursion on March 11, 2026 from 4:30 – 8:30pm. I took on the role, alongside two other clergy from the community, to provide both a deescalating presence and a comforting presence to those in need. Throughout the day, there had been numerous other clergy present to provide this role.

At the time that ICE agents, with the assistance of state troopers, broke down the door, I was a few yards away, face to face with an ICE agent. This ICE agent did not have a body camera (just a patch of Velcro) nor no name tag to identify him. He stood his ground. At one instance, when the crowd's momentum moved me toward the house, he used his shoulder to move me back, doing so skillfully and without harming me. He made little eye contact, keeping his gaze steady, above the crowd. He was dressed with intentionality. For the most part, he kept his elbows bent and hands clasped behind his back. Based on my observations, he seemed to be successful at not being reactive to the chaos,

noise, and verbal hostility. While I believe that he and his fellow officers were there improperly, this ICE agent, while I observed him, comported himself professionally.

That was not the case for the ICE agent next to him, immediately to my right. This officer wore a body camera, but it did not seem to be on. His shirt was not tucked into his pants. His eyes darted back and forth and he was sweating, giving a sense of fear and lack of readiness for the circumstance in which he found himself. Of most concern is that of all the law enforcement officers in my close-by range of view, he was the only one whose gun holster was unbuttoned as his right hand hovered just above.

This was disconcerting for many of us. One protester kept asking this officer, loudly and drawing attention, why his hand was on his gun. The officer did not respond verbally, but the movement of his eyes and sweat on his forehead conveyed to me that he was assessing whether this protester was a threat. Given that he was the one with his hand near his gun, the opposite was the more likely case.

Using a deescalation strategy with the protester, I talked to him. Eventually, though not right away, he left the immediate scene. While a secondary danger had disappeared with the absence of a protester shouting in the officer's face, the primary danger – the officer with his hand hovering over his gun when no other officer in close proximity was doing so – continued. I assessed that this officer would not respond well to an intervention from me, so I sought to talk to the ICE officer directly in front of me, who was next to him. He consented to listen to me.

I invited that ICE officer to notice that while he did not have his hand near his gun, which was buttoned up, and no one else did, his fellow officer near him did, and that this seemed to be out of protocol, since no one else was behaving this way. I asked him if he would intervene with his fellow officer. The ICE officer to whom I spoke listened and said that it was protocol. When I said that it was threatening, he said it was not. I affirmed again that not only did I find it threatening, but others in the crowd also experienced it this way too. I did not observe the ICE officer in front of me intervening in any way, though I know this reckless behavior of his fellow officer placed him at risk, alongside the protestors.

An ICE officer (or any law enforcement officer) equipped with a gun in an unbuttoned holster on an officer, particularly one who is showing signs reacting in a volatile situation, put all of us at risk.

Reverend Karen G. Johnston

Senior Minister, First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington

with love & courage,

Karen

Reverend Karen G. Johnston
Senior Minister
First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington

152 Pearl Street

Burlington, VT 05401

pronouns she/her/hers - why I list my pronouns

Our Mission: To inspire spiritual growth, to care for each other and our community, to seek truth, and to act for justice.

Mondays are my day to prepare worship
Fridays are my day of rest

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