

Dear Senate Judiciary Committee,

I hope this email counts me among the voices of Vermonters concerned about the federal government's continued paramilitary campaign against America's cities and immigrant communities, its manifestations of violence and cowardice, and its unlawful response to peaceful protest.

I have lived in Bennington since 2019 and feel deeply connected to our local and state communities through the shared values of freedom, kindness, democracy, and sustainability - and the concepts of diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and belonging so derided by the current occupants of the White House.

I'm aware of the ICE facility in Williston and its expansion plans, as well as the targeted raids in Berkshire, Hardwick, and Manchester. Five days ago, ICE was reportedly parked outside the Bennington Hannaford, though I can find no updates outside of a photo uploaded to iceinmyarea.org.

These small operations are problematic enough, as those detained posed no threat, played meaningful roles in their communities, and alternatively could have been assisted in a path towards naturalization. I can't help but wonder now when DHS will cast the full eye of Sauron onto Vermont as they have in various American cities, most recently in Portland and Lewiston, and of course in Minneapolis, where the entire nation watched the devastating, unjustifiable murder of Renee Nicole Good.

I imagine Vermont residents will be as fiercely protective of our communities as Minneapolis residents, and what happened to Renee Good could happen to any of us.

Compelled by the aforementioned values and concerns, I write today in support of bills S.208 and S.209. Bills S.208 and S.209 reflect the Vermont that I know and love, and I support their goals to hold law enforcement accountable by requiring identification, restricting mask use, and protecting people from arrest while traveling to, entering, remaining at, or returning from locations like government buildings, schools, shelters, and healthcare facilities. All human beings, regardless of race or immigration status, deserve access to critical services and care.

Additionally, any agent tasked with upholding the law should be willing and able to identify themselves in good faith. When using appropriate procedures, law enforcement agents do not need to conceal their identities. Masks provide cover for bad faith actors, create opportunities for impersonation by false agents, and foster an atmosphere of fear and distrust by mirroring autocratic, tyrannical regimes in other parts of the world.

Thank you for all of the work you do in service to Vermonters and for the many daily sacrifices you make on behalf of your constituents. I am grateful for your representation and for the thoughtful consideration I know you are already giving to this and many other matters of concern to our small but mighty state.

Respectfully,
Kristin Rhea Williams
Bennington, VT