

Dear South Burlington City Councilors, City Manager Baker, and South Burlington State Representatives,

Our names are Gabby Makatura and Andrew Schumer. We live at 6 Sherry Road in South Burlington, the home directly behind where the ICE operation took place on March 11th.

We had a brief opportunity to speak during the South Burlington City Council meeting on March 16th, but we are writing to follow up with a more detailed account of why we contacted Migrant Justice on the morning of March 11th, and why we are feeling deeply disappointed and concerned. In both the City Council meeting earlier this week and today's testimony at the Statehouse, we heard local police make repeated references to "keeping Vermonters safe." Based on what we experienced that morning, it did not feel as though that commitment extended to our neighbors.

On March 11th at approximately 8 am we were getting ready for work when Andrew noticed what appeared to be police lights on Dorset Street. From the back of our home, we have a clear view of our neighbor's house and partial visibility to Dorset. Upon closer inspection, Andrew realized that ICE agents were surrounding our neighbor's home. At that time, South Burlington Police were also present, primarily responding to a traffic accident caused by the ICE pursuit on Dorset Street.

In his testimony on March 16th, Police Chief Breault stated that although this was an ICE operation, the department did not assist ICE. He explained that officers handled the accident as they would any other, clearing the scene, towing the vehicle, and then leaving, while ICE was still present at the home and remained so throughout the entire day.

It is precisely this decision to leave, something we witnessed firsthand, that troubles us most.

During both the Statehouse hearing today and the March 16th City Council meeting, we heard city officials and police commend one another for how the situation was handled, while also condemning protesters. We spent the day peacefully protesting from our side of the fence, standing on ladders with signs. While we did not agree with every action or statement made by all protesters, we believe their presence was necessary.

From our vantage point, South Burlington Police observed that an ICE operation was unfolding at our neighbor's home and chose to vacate entirely, leaving our neighbors and our neighborhood without local support. They did not return until a crowd had gathered.

Had we not contacted Migrant Justice, we believe it is very likely that one or more members of that household, including minors, would have been taken from their home without public awareness or accountability. We urge you to consider the many active cases in which individuals, sometimes minors, are wrongfully detained and transferred through multiple facilities before eventually being released, if they are released at all. We contacted Migrant Justice to bring visibility to a situation that otherwise appeared to be

unfolding in silence and without local intervention, despite their awareness of the situation.

This raises difficult but necessary questions: Are the individuals inside that home not considered Vermonters worthy of protection, or even presence, by local authorities? Does the existence of a federal warrant absolve local responsibility to ensure community safety and transparency? What message does it send when local law enforcement disengages entirely under such circumstances?

We also feel compelled to express our disappointment with the City Council's swift and unequivocal approval of the police response before hearing from the public or conducting a comprehensive, multi-perspective review. Such rapid endorsement undermines public trust and gives the appearance of bias.

In light of all this, we ask:

- Why did local law enforcement leave the scene that morning?
- Why were our neighbors and our neighborhood left without support from those tasked with keeping us safe?
- Why did the City Council move so quickly to affirm the response without broader input?
- And what alternative did we have on the morning of March 11th but to call Migrant Justice?

While we may not agree with every action taken by protesters on March 11th, we believe they stepped in where local leadership did not and continues not to. They helped ensure that members of our community were not taken away without visibility or accountability.

We ask you to reflect seriously on these concerns and to consider what true public safety means for all Vermonters, regardless of where they were born, their immigration or asylum status, or the color of their skin.

Sincerely,
Gabby Makatura and Andrew Schumer