

**Good morning my name is Shawn Burke and I currently serve as the Interim Chief of Police in the City of Burlington, I have spent the last 32 years serving as a Vermont police officer, the last 10 of which have been in executive roles with the Burlington and South Burlington Police Departments. I would like to thank you all for the invitation to testify before this joint session of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees.**

**My colleague, Chief Breault has provided a detailed overview of the events which unfolded on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026, on Dorset Street in the City of South Burlington. Prior to this incident our agencies had been communicating with one another about our ability to manage a surge ICE operation, knowing that it was more of a question of when, and not if, ICE would begin to focus on Vermont.**

**In Burlington, Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak was equally concerned. We have been hearing about fear running through our refugee and migrant communities for months; kids not attending school, non-profits and volunteers delivering groceries, missed medical appointments, and the list goes on. Regardless of their immigration status, these communities are scared.**

**On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026, the Burlington Police Department became involved in the Dorset Street operation when the South Burlington Police Department requested mutual aid. The City of South Burlington team showed strong leadership in developing a plan focused on public safety and constitutional policing. If this plan had not been developed, and operationalized, I feel strongly that the outcomes would have been much worse.**

**The events unfolded as described by Chief Breault. I was in close communication with the BPD Deputy Chief assigned to the Incident Command Post. As the afternoon progressed, I was struck by two critical fail points, both avoidable but out of the control of Vermont law enforcement.**

**First, this incident was predicated on a botched enforcement plan launched by ICE to apprehend a subject wanted on what started as a civil violation. The failed car stop,**

vehicle collisions, and attempts made to apprehend the subject in such close proximity of a school campus were reckless and not in the interest of public safety.

Further, had the ICE agents actually ever positively identified the subject they sought and allegedly pursued to the Dorset Street address there is an exception to the search warrant rule they could have used to efficiently enter the house and apprehend the subject – hot pursuit. Instead, the agents opted to create a high profile and dangerously close perimeter which eventually drew the attention of the public and activism community.

The agents persisted and sought a criminal warrant in the US District Court in Burlington. The FBI joined and launched a criminal investigation into the purported assault on the agents rooted in the initial failed attempt to stop the subject. The ICE agents refused to stand down, leverage other investigative means, or consider options that could have deescalated the situation as suggested by Chief Breault.

Second, as the crowd grew on Dorset Street the peaceful activists were joined by agitators. A trojan horse of sorts, leading way to an escalation instigated by the crowd. The agitators ignored the announcement of a Judicial Warrant, ignored their responsibility to obey the law and ignored the lawful orders of the police on scene. The escalation of the crowd led to violence as officers were assaulted and hindered throughout the Judicially approved operation. This behavior was not activism; it was criminal and cannot be tolerated.

Collectively we need to name both of these areas of failure what they are and reckon with the fact that we cannot control either group without greater accountability. Greater accountability from the Federal government on their agency and greater accountability from the criminal legal system to address the violent agitators who cloaked themselves as activists.

The Burlington Police Department is currently reviewing our role in this incident to include the force employed by officers. Our officers showed tremendous restraint and

professionalism overall, and I know that their actions on March 11<sup>th</sup> helped in keeping people safe.

The Burlington Police Department works very hard to be a self-assessing and self-correcting agency. We have a strong legacy of relationship-based policing, progressive response models, and deescalation at all levels of response.

Our review will take time and then will go through additional levels of transparency as prescribed in Department Directive related to use of force complaints from the public.

There are always lessons learned from a thorough review of an incident; issues related to policy, training, equipment, and employee performance. These steps are critically important to help restore the trust the public holds in Vermont law enforcement – this incident has eroded the public’s confidence in their police.

In closing, this is a moment for leaders to come together and demonstrate unity to Vermonters. This is not a time for polarization. Vermonters deserve strong leadership at every level – collaborative leadership can help heal the harm caused by this incident and identify opportunities for growth as we work toward ensuring public safety for all.

**Shawn P. Burke – Interim Chief of Police**

[sburke@bpdvt.org](mailto:sburke@bpdvt.org)