

Statement of Ryan Schwank

For the Spotlight Forum

February 23, 2026

Submitted to

Senator Richard Blumenthal

Ranking Member of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations,  
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs

Representative Robert Garcia

Ranking Member of the House Oversight and  
Government Reform Committee

Senator Blumenthal, Representative Garcia, Committee Members:

My name is Ryan Schwank. I swore an oath to uphold the Constitution when I joined Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as an Assistant Chief Counsel. I followed that oath for four and a half years, working side by side with ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) officers; and I followed it when I resigned on February 13, 2026 (just over a week ago) so that I could speak to you today.

I am here as a concerned citizen and public servant; not as an opponent of the agency, nor as an advocate for those who violate our immigration laws. I believe in a strong and effective immigration system that

provides fair and transparent due process. I recognize the need for the United States to control its borders. I believe that a good immigration enforcement system requires dedicated and professional officers who know their legal duties and understand the limits of their authority and role. This is why I profoundly regret the need to be here today.

I am here today because I am duty bound to tell you the ICE Basic Immigration Enforcement Training Program is now deficient, defective, and broken.

While at ICE, I served as an Assistant Chief Counsel for the Office of the Principal Legal Advisor (OPLA) from August 1, 2021 until I resigned on February 13, 2026. Prior to ICE, I had worked in municipal law enforcement oversight. While at ICE, my duties included representing ICE in proceedings before the Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR). I also served as an onsite legal advisor at the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas. In September 2025, I became an Instructor for the incoming “surge” of new ICE recruits at the ICE Academy at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (“FLETC”) in Glynco, Georgia. As an ICE Academy instructor, I was responsible for teaching the legal curriculum to new ICE Agents being recruited as part of the “Surge”.

I was given the unique opportunity and privilege of training ICE cadets at FLETC on the constitutional and statutory limits of their authority, and regulatory requirements to enforce immigration law. I volunteered to take on this assignment based on my experience in law enforcement oversight, including at the state and local level prior to my service at ICE.

On my first day on the job at FLETC, I received secretive orders to teach new cadets to violate the Constitution by entering homes without a judicial warrant. For the last five months, I watched ICE dismantle the training program; cutting 240 hours of vital classes from a 584-hour program - classes that teach the Constitution, our legal system, firearms training, the use of force, lawful arrests, proper detention, and the limits of officer authority. For example, they ceased legal instruction regarding use of force. This means cadets are not taught what it means to be objectively reasonable – the very standard which the law requires them to meet when deciding whether or not to use deadly force. Our jobs as instructors are to teach them so well that they can make split second decisions about what they can and cannot do, in life and death situations. Yet in the name of churning out an endless stream of officers, DHS leadership has dismantled the academic and practical tests that we need to know if cadets can safely

and lawfully perform their job. All to satisfy an administration demanding they train thousands of new officers before the end of the year.

DHS told the public that new cadets receive all of the training they need to perform their duties; that no critical material or standards have been cut. This is a lie. ICE made the program shorter, and they removed so many essential parts that what remains is a dangerous husk. No reasonable person would believe a training program suddenly cut nearly in half could meet the minimum legal requirements. These aren't abstract rules, they're codified in regulations such as 8 CFR 287(g)(i). Congress required immigration officers to meet these minimum standards for a reason. ICE officers cannot lawfully perform their duties, make arrests, carry weapons, and use force without passing appropriate training.

New cadets are graduating from the academy despite widespread concerns among training staff that even in the final days of training the cadets cannot demonstrate a solid grasp of the tactics or the law required to perform their jobs. Without reform, ICE will graduate thousands of new officers who do not know their constitutional duty, do not know the limits of their authority, and do not have the training to recognize an unlawful order. That should scare everyone.

DHS assures the public these cadets get on the job training to compensate for anything missing at the academy. This too is a lie. Many graduates go to their home office just long enough to get their gun, badge, and body armor before deploying to Minneapolis or other ICE operations with minimal supervision. It is shocking that anyone thinks this is safe or responsible.

And this pattern of lies is not isolated. It extends beyond the training program to include deceiving Congress and the public about the rules followed by ICE officers once they graduate. On my first day at the Academy, I was instructed to read and return a memo in my supervisor's presence which claimed ICE officers could enter homes without a judicial warrant. The Acting ICE Director authorized the very conduct that DHS in 2025 legal training materials has called "the chief evil against which the wording of the Fourth Amendment is directed" -- that is "physical entry of the home" without consent or a proper warrant. Never in my career had I ever received such a blatantly unlawful order - nor one conveyed in such a troubling manner. I was being shown this memo in secret by a supervisor who made sure that I understood that disobedience could cost me my job.

ICE is teaching cadets to violate the constitution, and they were attempting to cloak it in secrecy.

I am here today to convey the public danger that is being created at the ICE Academy. I know from my conversations with many faculty members that I am not alone in my fear. Law enforcement is a deadly serious business. It is not a place for hyperbole, exaggeration, or falsehoods. Deficient training can and will get people killed. It can and will lead to unlawful arrests, violations of constitutional rights, and a fundamental loss of public trust in law enforcement. ICE is lying to Congress and the American people about the steps it is taking to ensure its over 10,000 new officers faithfully uphold the Constitution and can perform their jobs.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today about the intentional dismantling of the ICE Basic Immigration Enforcement Training Program; about the secretive I-205 memo; and to help this committee untangle the deceptive practices of ICE when it comes to both.