

Statement of Stella Carlson
September 22, 2026

Senator Blumenthal, Congressman Garcia, and distinguished members: Thank you for convening this forum and for having me here.

My name is Stella Carlson. I never expected to be someone testifying before you today. And I certainly never expected to bear witness to the final moments of a caring, peaceful, and dedicated member of my community, Alex Pretti, as he died at the hands of our own government.

I am just a regular person, but I care deeply about my community, and my state, and my country. And I believe there is power in ordinary people telling the truth.

On the morning of Saturday, January 24, I was getting ready to go to work in Minneapolis. I was supposed to be at a church community gathering, face painting children for three hours. And then I heard the whistles.

For the previous three weeks in January, as the Metro Surge rampage played out in the Twin Cities, many of us were out in the neighborhood doing meal delivery and mutual aid and walking around our streets and schools to ensure safety for children and to make sure there were enough people around so that people in my community felt safe enough to leave their homes.

The whistles were one of the ways we communicated with each other, and it meant ICE agents were in my neighborhood.

So, I went to see what was happening.

I wasn't looking for a confrontation that cold, bright morning. I was simply trying to be present for my community with the only tools I had: my own eyes, my phone, and my whistle.

When I turned onto Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis, I hardly recognized my own neighborhood. Instead of seeing families and my neighbors frequenting the local shops, I saw a scene that no one should ever witness in their own community. There were armed federal agents continuing to move in and blocking people in. I saw people being tackled. I saw agents punching the windows of cars. I saw what was happening in my neighborhood street, and I knew I needed to stop and assess. I realized I shouldn't keep driving.

And that's when I saw him. I saw the person whose name is now known all around the world: Alex Pretti.

I looked at Alex. He looked at me and pointed toward a parking spot. So I parked.

I didn't know Alex. I had never spoken to him. But I saw him standing in the street with a camera, filming what was happening and helping direct traffic. He was calm and peaceful. Alex was handling everything with grace and I believe preventing more people from being in harm's way. Alex was not a threat

The horrific killing of Renee Good was seared in mind and so I remember thinking that I should film Alex. There were so many agents and more arriving by the minute and their vehicles filled the block. There were so many things happening at once that I couldn't capture everything. But I saw Alex there, documenting what was happening, and I thought: I'm going to be his backup.

That's what ordinary people can do. We can observe and record. We can stand there and bear witness. So that is what I did.

Alex was in the street by himself. He had a camera in one hand and was directing traffic with his other hand. He was filming what the ICE agents were doing and trying to prevent harm.

And then everything changed. The agents' focus turned toward Alex. I was terrified, and it all moved so quickly. But I was more worried that what was happening would not be documented. The number of agents around Alex grew abruptly as I stood several feet away. I realized that something was happening quickly.

I locked into my phone. I didn't even realize that a chemical agent was in the air because my focus was on ensuring that my hand was steady and that the video image was clear. My eyes and throat were burning and I didn't understand why, only later learning that Alex had been aggressively pepper sprayed when he was defenseless on the ground.

Agents confronted Alex. He continued to film. I watched him try to help a woman who had been brutally knocked down by agents. I watched Alex be taken to the ground by agents as well. There was a swarm of agents on top of Alex, their faces masked.

In that moment, I believe Alex made a choice to be righteous and kind and brave: to stand up for his neighbors being assaulted in the street. And then they shot him. Again and again and again.

And then there was Alex on the ground. The agents fled. I watched Alex die.

I remember his body arching and his head rolling back. It happened incredibly fast, but it did not feel fast to me.

And then the agents came back and began manipulating his body, ripping open his clothes and moving him around like a ragdoll. I knew he was gone.

I couldn't understand why they were moving his body that way when he was already dead. I thought to myself: is this how DHS agents value the life of a citizen they have sworn to protect, a life they have just taken away?

And that image of his lifeless body stays with me.

But so does the image of Alex before the shooting: calm, holding his camera, directing traffic, trying to help.

His final act was an act of helping someone else and asking them, “Are you okay?”

That is the Alex Pretti that I saw in his final moments. Since January 24th, I have come to learn that this is how Alex (a nurse to veterans) was to everyone who knew him and loved him.

And that is why what happened afterward was so disturbing to me.

Because I feel like I witnessed two assassinations. The first was the assassination of Alex himself — the killing I watched happen in the streets of Minneapolis.

The second was the attempted assassination of his character. Afterward, powerful voices at the highest levels of government right here in Washington DC lied about Alex Pretti. They tried to take the gentle person I had watched with my own eyes and replace him with lies claiming he was a violent threat, someone who had come there to cause maximum damage, someone who wanted to kill law enforcement.

Not so. Those were all lies. I observed him and what happened with my own eyes.

The truth does not become less true because someone with great power tells a louder lie.

Although I was terrified, in that moment, I knew that I had to keep recording and to bear witness. I knew that I could not look away. And so have so many other people in my community throughout Metro Surge and sadly in a growing list of places from California and Illinois to Texas and Maine and beyond.

That's the lesson I want us to remember. Sometimes our job is simply to see what is happening and refuse to look away. Sometimes it is to blow the whistle and call out acts of violence and injustice by immigration officers. Sometimes it is to speak up when speaking is frightening. And when enough people are willing to do these things, the truth becomes much harder to bury.

I cannot change what happened to Alex. But I can refuse to let anyone rewrite what I saw ICE agents do when they took the life of Alex Pretti.

What happened to Alex cannot be treated as an isolated moment.

We have now seen the same questions arise as federal immigration tactics have surged across communities beyond Minnesota. When federal agents operate with overwhelming force, when people are killed, when witnesses feel scared, and when the public is given false accounts of what happened, then there must be accountability.

We need to know what happened. We need independent, thorough investigations. We need to know who made the decisions.

And we need that accountability at every level—including from the people who have the power to shape the government's false story.

Because Alex Pretti cannot speak for himself. But witnesses can. Cameras can. Ordinary people can.

And the more these violent and lawless tactics spread, the more important that becomes.

This is ultimately about whether, in America, the truth belongs to whoever has the most power—or whether the truth still has the power to hold government accountable.

I believe it does.

And that's why I will keep speaking.

Because Alex deserves the truth.

His family deserves the truth.

Our community deserves the truth.

And our government has an obligation to answer for what happened.

Thank you.