

Written Testimony  
Andrea Velez

Good afternoon, and thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Andrea Velez. I was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA —I'm an LA native. I am the proud daughter of Mexican immigrants and a graduate of Cal Poly Pomona. From my parents, I learned the values of kindness, respect, and integrity, and those lessons continue to guide me in everything I do. I bring with me an education, a strong work ethic, and a commitment to doing what is right. I am soft-spoken by nature and not one to seek conflict, but I must speak today not just for myself, but for those who cannot share their stories.

On Tuesday, June 24, my mother and sister dropped me off at my workplace in DTLA's Fashion District. Seconds later, the street was swarmed by unmarked cars. Masked men in plain clothes began chasing and attacking people without identifying themselves as ICE. One of them ran toward me. He was large and aggressive. Terrified, I used my work bag as a shield, but he grabbed me, slammed me onto the sidewalk, and accused me of interfering.

I asked for his badge or a warrant. He refused. He told me I didn't need to know who he was and that I should "just look at his vest." He handcuffed me without checking my ID. They ignored me as I repeated — again and again — that I am a U.S. citizen. They did not care. They took my belongings and placed me in an unmarked vehicle.

I was unaware that my mother and sister had witnessed everything unfolding and felt powerless to intervene. They feared that if these men could do this to me, they could just as easily do the same to them. They called 911 for help, LAPD did not protect me that day; they aided ICE instead.

As helicopters hovered and sirens closed in, I trusted LAPD would protect us. I managed to escape the unmarked car and ran toward the officers, pleading for help and telling them I did not know who these masked men were. I begged to be taken by them rather than by masked strangers. Yet the officers allowed the masked men to take me and parade me as a spectacle.

Another U.S. citizen, Luis Hipolito, was detained that day for recording. ICE pepper-sprayed, jumped him, beat him, restrained him by the neck, and still pointed a taser gun at him. Hipolito kept asking for medical assistance, but they minimized his pain as "not a big deal" despite convulsing, bleeding, and struggling to breathe. While being held in

our temporary holding, Hipolito thought he was not going to make it out alive, and only after he went into shock did ICE finally decide to call an ambulance.

In the chaos of ICE's disorganization, I spent most of the first day handcuffed and shackled in a van, watching people arrive distraught and taken against their will, while ambulances came and went for those attacked. Requests to use the bathroom or ask for food were met with hostility and anger.

Inside, I was denied the right to call my family or speak to a lawyer. ICE refused to disclose my whereabouts to my family and my colleagues; no one could locate me.

They later forced me to stand front and center, surrounded by officers with their backs turned, staged like a mugshot DHS likes to use to brand us as criminals, stripping us of dignity. They want to paint us as the worst of the worst—but the truth is, we are human beings, with no criminal record.

While detained at the Metropolitan Detention Center, I was unable to access drinking water without first purchasing a cup. I was thirsty. Thankfully, a detainee lent me theirs, and later, another detainee leaving that day donated a cup and a spork, allowing me to eat dinner. Officers told me I would be held for one night. Yet, it extended to two without explanation, and I was issued a uniform as if my stay would be longer.

I remained in custody until Thursday, and it was only at my court hearing that day that I first learned of the charges against me. In disbelief, I read the affidavit falsely claiming I had struck an ICE agent on the face and that I belonged to an organized group that attacks them. Two weeks later, my case was dismissed for lack of evidence.

Since that day, I no longer feel safe. Though I try to detach from my trauma, our community continues to be targeted simply because of the color of our skin. We are left vulnerable, forced to fend for ourselves—and if this is how U.S. citizens are treated, imagine the cruelty inflicted on those without. I urge you to hold ICE and every agency accountable for their vile, disgusting, and inhumane treatment of our Hispanic and immigrant communities. We need action. We need change. We need justice.

I stand for every silenced voice, every family broken by fear, every community stripped of its humanity. Dignity, safety, and justice are not privileges—they are fundamental rights.