

BICAMERAL PUBLIC FORUM
TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY FROM FIVE U.S. CITIZENS
ASSAULTED, ILLEGALLY DETAINED BY DHS

Held by U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Ranking Member of the Senate
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, and
U.S. Representative Robert Garcia (D-CA), Ranking Member of the House Committee on
Oversight and Government Reform

Testimony of George Retes
U.S. Citizen and Iraq Combat Veteran

Ranking members Blumenthal and Garcia:

My name is George Retes. I'm here today not to reopen old wounds, but as a veteran, a father, and an ordinary person who still believes in the promise of this country and the values represented by our flag. I respect law enforcement. I respect the men and women who serve. But I also believe that accountability is not the enemy of respect—it is its foundation.

On July 10, 2025, I was confronted by ICE agents on my way to work. I want you to understand exactly what that looked like, not because I want sympathy, but because it exposes a crack in the law that must be fixed.

I was driving to my job as a security guard at a licensed farm in Camarillo, California. Federal immigration agents were lined across the road leading to the farm. I identified myself as a U.S. citizen and a veteran, but that didn't matter. Agents smashed my window, sprayed tear gas and pepper spray into my car, and dragged me out. I was choking on gas, unable to breathe, while officers shouted conflicting commands. Even after I complied, they pinned me down — one kneeling on my back and another kneeling on my neck, while my hands were already behind me.

I was first taken to a Navy base, where agents collected my DNA. After that, I was taken to a detention center and held for three days without charges. No phone call. No lawyer. No medical care, even though my skin burned from the chemicals. I wasn't allowed to shower.

On Friday morning, they placed me on suicide watch. Suicide watch is a yellow concrete room with a concrete bed and a thin mattress. The lights stay on 24/7. You're stripped naked and put in a hospital gown. A guard watches you constantly. I remained in those conditions from Friday morning until the moment I was released. My family had no idea where I was. I was released without explanation and without a single charge.

That entire experience violated the very principles I fought to defend. And here's the truth: it happened because of a gap in the law that allowed it. If these had been state or local officers, I could take them to court right now and demand answers. But because they were federal agents, they are shielded by a blanket immunity.

That's why I'm here. The point is not to look backward, but forward. What can we do *together* to ensure this never happens again? This is not about politics. It is about principle. It is about fixing a flaw that undermines the freedoms we claim to protect.

I still believe in the flag. I still believe in the ideals that make this country worth fighting for. But belief alone is not enough. We need action. We need accountability. And we need laws that reflect the values we say we stand for.

Thank you for allowing me to speak. I hope my experience serves as a call to strengthen, not weaken, the trust between citizens and the institutions sworn to protect them.