AMERICA'S VOICE

Rein In ICE: How the New Congress Can Hold the Mass Deportation Machine Accountable

To: Interested Parties
From: Vanessa Cárdenas, Executive Director, America's Voice
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Re: How the New Congress Can Hold the Mass Deportation Machine Accountable

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For nearly two years, Donald Trump and Stephen Miller have run their mass deportation machine without accountability. As a result, ICE has terrorized our communities, stonewalled Congress, and ignored invitations to testify. Meanwhile, the toll kept mounting: people dying in custody, American citizens shot and killed by federal agents, children left behind when parents were taken, and an ICE Tax hitting every household. On November 3, voters resoundingly rejected that agenda. Latino voters helped lead the way: about 7 in 10 backed Democratic House candidates, just two years after Trump won close to half the Latino vote.

Trump and Miller answered the defeat by doubling down. Days after the election, Trump named Miller his White House chief of staff, and Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin declared that "deportations will continue." In January, the new majority will hold the gavel, the subpoena, and the power of the purse. The new Congress has both the mandate and the tools to rein in ICE, hold the architects of this agenda accountable, end the blank check fueling it, and begin delivering real solutions for immigrant families. Each tool offers a clear place to start, and families across the country are counting on its leaders to use them.

The gavel: put the human toll on the record

Since January 2025, the outgoing Congress refused to hold ICE accountable, even as at least 62 people died in agency custody under this administration. ICE's own investigators found that 23 of 29 immigrants who died in detention between January 2025 and January 2026 received medical care the agency deemed deficient. Federal immigration agents killed U.S. citizens Ruben Ray Martinez in Texas and Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minnesota.

Children have paid the highest price. Brookings estimates that 205,000 children, including roughly 145,000 U.S. citizens, have had a parent detained. Immigration agents have also detained more than 500 U.S. citizens, including at least 70 children and teens, and ICE is now arresting parents and labeling their children "unaccompanied."

U.S. Rep. Robert Garcia (D-CA), the incoming chair of the House Oversight Committee, has named DHS and ICE abuses a top priority, while Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS), the top Democrat on the House Homeland Security Committee, has promised to prioritize investigations into the deaths of people in DHS custody. Public hearings should center the families who have buried loved ones and the children who watched a parent taken away, placing their testimony alongside the officials responsible.

The subpoena: make Miller and his officials answer for their actions

Trump's officials have treated congressional oversight as optional. ICE has refused to answer basic questions from lawmakers about people in its custody. Members of Congress have a legal right to make unannounced oversight visits to detention facilities, yet DHS forced them to go to court twice just to exercise it. Tom Homan and Stephen Miller declined to appear when House Homeland Security Democrats invited them to testify this spring. As Rep. Thompson put it: "In the majority, they will not have that choice."

The questions waiting for them are urgent, starting with Miller's arrest quotas. ICE leadership has instructed officers to target around 19,000 arrests per week, and U.S. officials have said Miller's promotion signals the crackdown will not scale back. Those quotas are already playing out on the ground: in just days following the election, masked officers blocked a hospital emergency room driveway in a California Latino neighborhood, and authorities in Alabama arrested 19-year-old twin brothers with pending asylum applications and work permits.

Last week, America's Voice and 17 Latino, immigrant, and civil rights organizations urged incoming leaders to make Miller their first witness. His new title as White House chief of staff must not shield him from answering for the agenda he built. The coalition is also calling for subpoenas of border czar Tom Homan, Secretary Mullin, and Acting ICE Director David Venturella for sworn testimony and records on deaths in custody, child detention, and the killing of U.S. citizens. With subpoena power, the new majority can finally get the answers our communities deserve, under oath.

The power of the purse: follow the money

The outgoing Congress handed ICE $75 billion through 2029, and the administration is racing to spend it before the new Congress arrives. DHS awarded a $31.8 million contract to convert a warehouse in Roxbury, New Jersey, into a detention center – despite a court order barring the move – and completed the environmental review needed to move ahead with a second warehouse in Arizona. Days after the election, CoreCivic's CEO urged ICE to "move quickly" on new detention deals.

Families are paying for this agenda twice. As America's Voice has documented, mass deportation imposes an ICE Tax on every household, driving up the price of food, housing, and home health care while draining customers from local businesses wherever ICE operates. The 2025 enforcement surge cost an estimated 668,000 jobs, and a follow-up report found the average retiree's Social Security benefit could be cut by $2,152 a year starting in 2034 if current policies do not change. An agency that burns through billions in taxpayer dollars while raising prices for every household is precisely what oversight exists to stop.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries has promised Democrats will not give "a dime" to Trump's "violent mass deportation machine." The new majority can make good on that promise by ending the blank check – freezing new ICE spending and contracts until Congress receives a full accounting of how the agency has used its funds, and using the power of the purse to claw back the exorbitant amount of money fueling this abuse.

What comes next

In January, a new Congress arrives with new majorities, dozens of new members, and a mandate to act. Accountability is the essential first step toward common-sense solutions that strengthen our economy and reflect our values as a nation. Those solutions can start now. Leader Jeffries has committed to moving the American Dream and Promise Act, which would give Dreamers and people with temporary protections a path to permanent status. A discharge petition led by

U.S. Rep. Sylvia Garcia (D-TX) is just one Republican signature away from forcing a House vote, and Jeffries has called for getting it done now. If it does not pass this year, he has pledged that the new majority will move the bill "early in the next Congress."

Democrats can and should build on that commitment by outlining a way forward on reforming our immigration system centered on providing an earned pathway to citizenship for long-established immigrants. It is time to refocus the conversation on permanent solutions for Dreamers, farm workers, healthcare workers and others who are part of our families, communities, and workplaces.

America's Voice stands ready to work alongside the new Congress, bringing the stories of affected families, the evidence of what this agenda has cost, and the full strength of our partners to the work of reining in ICE and taking us in a new direction on immigration reform.