

Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-CA)
Testimony on Immigration Raids: Postville and Beyond
Committee on Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and
International Law

July 22, 2008

Chairwoman Lofgren, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. Congress has a necessary role in making sure that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids are conducted humanely and consistent with protecting the needs of families and children, and I commend the Subcommittee for its continued oversight.

The manner in which ICE raids are carried out can be as important as when and where they take place. Unfortunately, ICE's practices in my District have been neither humane nor protective. Agents arrested parents right in front of their children, creating widespread panic and resulting in 50 to 60 students leaving school for weeks at a time. Despite the fact that nearly two thirds of children with undocumented parents are U.S. citizens, ICE has not developed a consistent and comprehensive policy for dealing with children. In fact, ICE's increasingly reliance on home raids, which are not covered by ICE's guidelines for humanely conducting workplace raids, means that children are often left unprotected.

During home raids conducted in March 2007, some parents sent their children to school because they believed they weren't safe at home. One little girl was told by her mother to pack some essentials in her backpack and leave it by the door. If she found ICE had taken her mother when she returned from school, the little girl was to take the backpack and go to her aunt's house. Imagine what this child was thinking as she left for school.

Earlier this year, ICE agents stopped a father walking his daughter to school at Bahia Vista Elementary School in San Rafael, California. Her father did not speak English, and ICE agents asked the young girl, not more than eight years old, to translate for him ICE's questions about his immigration status. ICE later took this girl's father away.

On May 20, 2008, I chaired a hearing in the House Workforce Protections Subcommittee on how ICE workplace raids have impacted children and local communities. At this hearing, a constituent of mine, Katherine Gibney, the Principal at the San Pedro Elementary School in San Rafael, testified about how school officials cared for frightened students during last year's raids and rode the buses to make sure students didn't return to empty homes.

Two days after the Subcommittee hearing, ICE agents launched another raid in San Rafael. Ms. Gibney's school was, again, one of the schools most impacted by the raids. ICE vans parked near school bus stops terrified children as they left their parents and boarded their school buses. Absentee rates at the schools increased dramatically. One of the schools canceled its Open House planned for that night out of fear for the safety of parents and students.

Madame Chairwoman, there are more effective and humane ways to enforce our immigration laws than through raids that terrify communities. Chairman Edward Kennedy and I have each sent letters to the Department of Homeland Security discussing the need for a comprehensive policy to address the needs of children impacted by ICE

raids, and I ask to submit these letters for the record. Both of the letters are awaiting a response. We can no longer wait to address the impact these raids are having on families and children, many of whom are in the U.S. legally and many of whom are U.S. citizens. It's unacceptable that home raids, where children are most likely to be impacted, do not have strong protections for children.