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LD 2106

My name is Jamie Watkins, I am a resident of Portland, Maine where I live with my wife and two young daughters.

I wish to express my grave concern about the events which have unfolded over the past week following the recent surge of the Federal ICE/DHS agents in our beloved home state and city, and to testify strongly in favor of LD 2106.

While the stated objective of operation 'Catch of the Day' is to target "the worst of the worst criminal illegal aliens who have terrorized communities" the aggressive, violent tactics and unprofessional conduct of ICE and DHS agents serving on this operation has had the exact opposite effect on day-to-day life in our city. Perhaps most importantly, ICE's conduct in just a few short days has had a profoundly traumatic effect on our community's school children, our educators, and on the health care professionals who provide essential services to the most vulnerable members of our community. This is unacceptable, and requires the much clearer legal protections that LD 2106 would provide.

One need not look further than trusted, non-partisan local news outlets such as the Portland Press Herald or News Center Maine to see footage of graphic sudden arrests, needlessly carried out in plain sight in the middle of the day - Or even worse, right outside our places of public education and healthcare.

The small list of violent criminals who have been arrested this week on DHS' website does not justify the grave suffering this operation has inflicted on everyday life in our community. The conduct of ICE agents in Maine over the past week calls into question what actual training and oversight these individuals are receiving. If their stated goal is to catch violent criminals, DHS and ICE should focus on how this can be done swiftly with minimal collateral damage to everyday lives - not by harassing children and their parents at school drop off, nurses on the way to work, or onlookers shocked to see a violent removal of a compliant suspect from their car on a busy street.

As stated, LD 2106 would reinstate critical protections for children, workers at public schools, healthcare facilities, daycares, and libraries. These are essential sites of support and learning for our children, and for those who are vulnerable to health issues, or are in need of additional assistance. As a parent of young children, it makes me sick to think that these locations have been subject to the violent, chaotic, and aggressive tactics of ICE operations. LD 2106 would provide a timely and essential set of safeguards for our young learners, their families and educators, and for healthcare workers providing essential services.

Empathy is an important tool in times of crisis - One has to believe that some, if not most, of the federal agents who are serving as a part of this operation believe that what they are doing is for the common good. After all, no one is the villain in their own story. In order to move forward out of this crisis, these agents clearly need better training, more focus on de-escalation and accountability to law-abiding community members, and clear, legal parameters on where and how they can apprehend their targets to minimize trauma for children, families, and the community writ-large. Our children and their educators should not have to feel afraid going to school. Our healthcare workers should not have to feel afraid going to work, nor should our neighbors have to feel afraid going to hospital if they are injured.

There may not be a simple solution to the current crisis we find ourselves in. But LD 2106 is a step in the right direction, and an important opportunity for us all to refocus how we can make our community a safe, welcoming, and positive place for our children and families to live.

Thank you for reading my testimony, and for providing the concerned citizens of our great city and state with an opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns.