

**SUBMITTED TO THE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT
REFORM**

Hearing on “Criminal Aliens Released by the Department of Homeland Security”

April 28, 2016

Testimony of Scott Root

Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Cummings, and respected members of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, my name is Scott Root and I thank you for the opportunity to be the voice of my murdered daughter, Sarah Rae-Ann Root. Sarah was murdered on Sunday, January 31st at approximately 2:00 a.m. by a drunk driver and illegal immigrant, Edwin G. Mejia. Less than 24 hours earlier, Sarah walked with a 4.0 GPA with a Bachelor's in Criminal Investigations from Bellevue University.

My family and I would like to take this opportunity to thank officers Bowes, Rizzo, Adam and Dawn Turnbull and Swanson of the Omaha Police department for their help and support to my family since the accident. We would also like to thank the Congressmen and staff of Steve King and Robert Goodlatte. We also want to thank the Senators and staff of Ernst, Fischer, Grassley, Sasse and Sessions and the doctors and nurses at the University of Nebraska Medical Center

As a 30 year member of Steamfitters Local 464, it is ironic that I find myself thanking Republican House and Senate members who reached out to us within days and weeks of Sarah's death. My ex-wife and I were not contacted by any Democrats or ICE officials until April 22nd - after they learned I would testify at this hearing - and 82 days after my daughter was murdered. We were told that ICE had a victim's unit and that they would be reaching out to us.

I am an Army veteran and served with the 1st Cav. My father was a World War II Army medic who was the recipient of a Purple Heart, Silver Star and the French medal, Croix de Guerre which is awarded to foreign soldiers aiding the French under threat of enemy combatants. I don't share this to talk about ourselves, rather to point out that the Root family has served their country when called upon and now we're asking for your help in getting answers and justice.

My mother and sister legally immigrated to the United States after World War II and aspired to become American citizens. In my opinion, the Obama administration with their open borders policy has changed us. No longer do we ask immigrants to assimilate to our way of life, rather local schools, governments are required to accommodate their needs and not the needs of the country. My mother and sister took pride in becoming Americans and learning the language and culture. By allowing illegal immigrants to take custody of other illegal immigrants, there are no controls in place if a person like Edwin Mejia – the man who killed my daughter - were to break our laws.

Sarah was a daughter, sister, granddaughter, niece, cousin and friend. She was bright, loving, smart, caring, lovable, respectful and strong. Like her brother, mother and I, she stood up for her beliefs. My son Scott lost his best friend, confidante and sister when Sarah died. Her mother Michelle lost her best friend, daughter and fellow Kansas City Chief's fan. I lost my opportunity to walk my only daughter down the aisle on her wedding day and spoil the grandchildren she wanted. She loved to fish with her family and this year she wanted to try deer hunting.

Early in the morning of January 31st, we received the call no parent should ever get and that changed all of our lives. My family was summoned to the hospital and at approximately 4:00 a.m. had to deal with what we thought was a broken arm or leg. We didn't dare to think the worst and couldn't imagine the nightmare awaiting us. I was asked to do something that no father should have to do and that was identify their child.

Her spinal cord was snapped and her skull fractured in two places. Her face was swollen and she was unrecognizable. We identified her by a tattoo on her rib cage that read, "Live, Laugh, Love" with a crucifix. When we asked the neurosurgeon on a scale of 1 to 100, what was her chance for recovery and he said 0, no parent should have to deal with that especially with a situation that would have been prevented if the current laws had been followed and enforced.

Sarah is the hero as she was an organ donor. Her mother and I kept her on life support for three days to allow the organ recipients and their doctors to prepare for harvesting of her organs and surgery for the recipients. Through Sarah's unselfish act, she was able to save the lives of six individuals. She also helped another four to five dozen more through the donation of tissue, tendons and bones.

Since the accident we've since learned that Edwin had been apprehended in Arizona as a 16 year old minor, yet our government allowed him to be turned over to his brother, another illegal immigrant. Due to the pressure being applied by the mentioned congressman and senators, Edwin is now listed on ICE's top Ten Most Wanted list. It is ironic that on his webpage the words "unlawful" and "illegal" are mentioned yet when apprehended in Arizona he was released to the custody of another illegal immigrant.

When the Omaha Police department approached the Omaha ICE office five times requesting a detainer and were rejected each time, the now "unlawful" and "illegal" Edwin was released after four days in jail and after his brother posted 10% of \$50,000, which is \$5,000 bail. It cost more to bury my daughter and she and her family and friends were given a death sentence and the denial of her love, companionship and friendship.

My family and I understand that our questions may not be answered today but I want to go on the record asking the following:

1. At a local level, my family and friends are collecting signatures on judicial complaint forms that anyone can sign to present to the Nebraska Supreme Court where our goal is to get Judge Jeff Marcuzzo removed from the bench for ignoring the facts that Edwin failed to show for minor traffic infractions and the flight risk he presented. Our question is, who at the federal level is accountable? Sarah Saldana? Jeh Johnson? Barack Obama? President Harry Truman used to say, "the buck stops here." This is not the case in the Obama administration. Judge Marcuzzo recently set bail for another illegal immigrant accused of motor vehicle homicide in Omaha at \$2 million dollars and the local Omaha ICE office set a detainer on him.
2. Congressman Goodlatte and Senator Grassley authored a joint letter to Jeh Johnson demanding answers about our case. Senator Sasse has demanded answers from Sarah Saldana. If they cannot get answers, how can a family from Iowa get any and why hasn't anyone been held accountable at the local or national level? It's been 2 ½ months that the senators and congressman have requested answers from ICE, when can the family expect to get answers?
3. The Omaha Police department did their jobs and Edwin Mejia was released. Who is paying for the time and effort at the local and national level for the additional investigative and fugitive work? What about the medical bills for Edwin Mejia? The American taxpayer, that's who. It's my understanding that illegal immigrants kill, injure or maim thousands of Americans yearly.
4. How is it that Edwin's illegal brother was able to bail him out and has now disappeared? How is this not aiding and abetting? Were taxes paid on the money used? Do I get a choice as to which laws to follow? If not, why does an "unlawful" and "illegal" immigrant get rewarded and Sarah's family and friends are punished.
5. According to the local officials of ICE, Edwin's crime did not meet its criteria for the level of violence. Would someone please explain how my daughter who had her spinal cord snapped and skull fractured in two places by a 6,000 pound pickup loaded with 1,000 pounds of roofing equipment that hits my daughter's 3,000 pound SUV at an estimated 70-80 miles per hour driven by an underage, three times over the limit, .241 drunk driving, drag racing illegal immigrant from Honduras is not violent? Explain to me what is then?
6. What information do we have on Edwin's family and friends? Who owned the vehicle that Edwin was driving when he killed my daughter? Our understanding is that it was another illegal immigrant that lived in Wichita, Kansas, yet he was driving the streets of Omaha with no driver's license, no registration and no insurance. Edwin did not honor his court obligations for minor traffic violations, why was it assumed he would show for motor vehicular homicide?
7. On an international level, has an Interpol Red Notice been issued? If not, whose responsibility is it to ensure it occurs and when will it be done? What other steps are being taken? Do we know Edwin's maternal/paternal name? Does he have a Cedula card? What is being done in his home country of Honduras? When Edwin was apprehended in Arizona, was a file created? If so, has the information been communicated to law enforcement?

8. If the Obama administration's position is to not enforce existing immigration law, what is the purpose of ICE and are our tax dollars being wasted? The only incentive to capture him is the \$5,000 reward through Omaha Crime Stoppers. What other tools or means are available to local and national law enforcement to incent people in Honduras, Mexico or here in the United States to turn Edwin into the authorities?

In closing, my family and friends will not stop until people at the local and federal level are held accountable and her killer brought to justice. When Edwin is caught, he will face 20 years in prison, 8-10 years with good behavior, but my family is facing a life sentence without her. Her death was avoidable and would not have occurred if not for the failed policies of the Obama administration that allowed the laws to be ignored and an incompetent local judicial system.

The last time I saw Sarah was on January 30th, the day she graduated from Bellevue University. Now I carry her close to my heart in the crucifix around my neck.

I want to leave you with a personal story. When Sarah was young, she had a patch of hair on her back and I would tease her by calling her Monkey Girl, a nickname she hated but she knew came from the love of a father. I love you forever Monkey Girl.

Thank you for the opportunity to share Sarah's and my family's story.

Scott Root

Scott Root Bio

My name is Scott Root. I am the father of Sarah Root. I am an Army veteran and served with the 1st Cav. I have been a member of Steamfitters Local 464 for 30 years. Sarah was my only daughter and with all the events that have taken place, my family and I have been fighting to give her the justice she deserves.