

**Statement by Reverend Mariah Tollgaard**  
**Before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**  
**Hearing on “Oversight of Fraud and Misuse of Federal Funds in Minnesota: Part II”**  
*Wednesday, March 4, 2026*

Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I am the Reverend Mariah Tollgaard, and I serve as Senior Pastor at Hamline Church United Methodist in Saint Paul, Minnesota. I come before you today in my personal capacity—as a pastor, as a citizen, as a mother—an ordinary Minnesotan who has witnessed, up close, the fear and harm that Operation Metro Surge has inflicted on our state.

The hearing today is about “Fraud in Minnesota,” which is serving as a pretext for the terror the federal government has brought to the people of Minnesota. This “fraud” has been used as the rationale for deploying 3,000 federal immigration enforcement agents into our state—in operations that target the most vulnerable among us, but are indiscriminately impacting all of us.

Let me tell you what this looks like where I live. In my church, members have been afraid to come to worship and have even postponed funerals. An elderly Hmong man in our city—a U.S. citizen—was taken from his home in the freezing cold wearing only his underwear and a blanket. ICE vehicles drive recklessly through our neighborhoods in packs of four to six, stopping people of color for proof of citizenship, including a local police officer.

In Saint Paul Public Schools, where my three daughters attend, nearly a quarter of students enrolled in distance learning because families were too afraid to leave their homes. My eight year old struggles to sleep at night because she is afraid ICE agents might break into our house.

At local elementary schools in Minnesota and across the country, students are practicing drills for what to do if ICE is near their school. Let that sit with you: American children are now practicing two kinds of drills at school: one for an active shooter, and one to protect themselves from their own government. That is not security. That is a nation failing its children.

This is happening to all of our neighbors in Minnesota. Every Minnesotan has stories that will stay with you—from hearing of someone hiding in a walk-in cooler or a back room when ICE stormed into their place of work—to friends and family members being followed when they’re dropping off their children at day care.

In Minnesota, we love our neighbors. We care for one another. And because we believe every person bears the image of God, we’ve built systems that reflect that belief: free meals for all children, healthcare for families who need it, schools where every kid belongs. That’s what love of neighbor looks like in action.

This Administration has targeted Minnesota because we live out our values of loving our neighbors. These tactics aimed at undermining those values have not succeeded.

When unidentified, masked agents appeared on our streets, Minnesotans put on their own uniform—and it said *Neighbor*.

Motivated by faith and conscience: We bought groceries for families in hiding. We paid rent. We drove children to school. We stood vigil at mosques. We served as constitutional observers. We pledged to care for children if parents were detained. We sang. We marched. We prayed.

As a Pastor, I say if you feel even a flicker of discomfort hearing these stories, pay attention to it. If you hear about children like Liam Ramos, if you saw the videos of the murders of Alex Pretti and Renee Good, if you know of workers arrested in the very restaurants where they serve federal agents their meals, if you understand that citizens and legal residents have been wrongfully detained, and something in you tightens—that is not partisanship. That is conscience. In my faith tradition, we call that still quiet voice the voice of God. It is not too late to listen—to change our minds, our hearts, and our policies.

To the members of this committee and our leaders across the government: The question I leave with you is simple: what are you willing to do about it? Your silence has a cost, and it is being paid right now by children who cannot sleep, by families who cannot grieve, and by communities that are hollowed out.

To Americans across the country and those watching from home, to the families who are still afraid to answer a knock at the door, who go to the gas station at 2:00 AM out of fear, who have not yet held funerals for the people they have lost: You are not forgotten. And there are more people fighting for you than you know.

Jesus teaches us in Matthew 25, “Whatever you do for the least of these, you do unto me.”

History will tell its story about us—but long before then, our own souls will know whether we stood with them or turned away. No nation can build a true future on the terror of its own people. Security built on fear will shatter the first time it is tested. Only a community that chooses love of neighbor over fear will endure—and that is still within our power to become.

Thank you for allowing me to share our story. I am deeply proud to be a Minnesotan.