

**Statement of Ronald D. Vitiello**  
**Nominee to be Director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement**  
**November 15, 2018**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member McCaskill, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. As a career law enforcement officer who has served our nation for more than 30 years, I am honored and humbled to be nominated by the President to be the Director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. I also want to thank Secretary Nielsen for her support and confidence in me.

I am blessed to also have the support of my wife, Nuri, and my children, Alexis and Ron Jr., who are here with me today.

As the largest investigative branch within the Department of Homeland Security, ICE has a critically important mission to protect our public safety and national security by enforcing U.S. immigration and customs laws – whether it’s combatting the illegal drug trade, removing illegal aliens who are a threat to public safety, or protecting children from online predators.

This is a mission I understand well after more than three decades of experience in the Border Patrol. In 1985, I started as an agent patrolling the front lines of our border, and I worked in the interior and on both the Northern and Southern Borders. Later, I took on greater leadership and policy roles as Chief of the Border Patrol, and most recently as acting Deputy Commissioner at U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Because of these experiences, I have a deep understanding of the laws and policies governing our immigration system and am well prepared to lead ICE.

My experience includes working to maintain professional standards and sustain morale while the Border Patrol experienced rapid growth. I helped lead efforts to improve training and strengthen accountability for use of force incidents, which resulted in a significant decrease in the use of force. Working with Congress, the Office of Personnel Management, and fellow senior leaders at CBP, we implemented a new pay and compensation statute that saved taxpayers more than \$110 million in the first year of implementation and added operational capacity to the agency.

Throughout my career in the Border Patrol, I worked closely with partners at ICE – which has a complex, but crucial role in our immigration system. My appreciation and understanding of the men and women who serve at ICE has only deepened since I became Acting Director in June.

Despite adverse conditions that would cripple many other workplaces, ICE employees carry out their important mission with integrity, courage and excellence. Since my start at ICE, I’ve made it a top priority to meet with front line personnel in the field and ensure that their voices are heard and supported.

The work ICE does to uphold public safety, national security and the rule of law both in the United States and around the world is undeniable. During Fiscal Year 2018, for example,

arrests of illegal aliens with criminal histories increased nearly 50 percent, and removals increased over 13 percent. ICE seized nearly 900,000 pounds of narcotics – including more than 2,300 pounds of fentanyl, which is fueling the deadly opioid crisis. We identified and rescued more than 850 children who were victims of sexual exploitation and over 300 victims of human trafficking. We made 11,000 arrests of known or suspected gang members – including more than 2,000 linked to MS-13 – and removed nearly 6,000 gang members from our country.

These successes – and the dedicated men and women who achieved them – are too often drowned out or wrongly maligned by misleading rhetoric and misinformation in the public sphere. This kind of rhetoric needlessly escalates the risk in our operational environment – making an already challenging job all the more difficult and dangerous. It also harms the morale of our workforce, which is composed of people just like you who go to work each day to make our communities and our country safer.

Like you, our employees are public servants. They should not be threatened with violence or targeted at their homes. They should not face interruptions to their lawful operations. They should not have to bear the burden of attacks motivated largely by political and policy disagreements.

If confirmed, one of my highest priorities will be to better demonstrate to the public, Congress, and the media the importance of our mission to homeland security and public safety – and why our agency’s existence should not be up for debate.

Part of that effort is simply remembering why ICE was created in the first place. Following the September 11<sup>th</sup> terror attacks, the 9/11 Commission identified critical gaps in our national security – including the need for stronger interior immigration enforcement and border security. To address those needs and to prevent future attacks on our homeland, our government stood up ICE and the Department of Homeland Security. Eliminating these threats and vulnerabilities through cooperative, effective enforcement is as important today as it was when the Commission’s report was published.

I believe Congress shares the goal of a strong border and an immigration system that has integrity, and if confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this Committee to address this and the many other challenges our agency faces as we seek to ensure the continued security of the American people. I also appreciate the Committee’s important oversight role, and I am committed to ensuring our agency remains accountable to Congress and the taxpayers.

The men and women of ICE are among our nation’s finest and most hard-working public servants and it is a privilege to serve alongside them. I am grateful for them, their loved ones and the sacrifices they make in service to America. Should I be confirmed, it would be a tremendous honor to continue supporting and advocating for them as they carry out their vital mission.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.