

August 29, 2025

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 C Street, SW, 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20472

The Honorable Rodney S. Scott
Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20004

The Honorable Bill Groffy
Acting Director
Bureau of Land Management
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Noem, Commissioner Scott, and Acting Director Groffy,

We write to express our profound concern and seek immediate transparency regarding reports that U.S. Border Patrol agents—in conjunction with Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service—arrested two firefighters while they were battling the 9,000-acre Bear Gulch wildfire on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington.¹ According to multiple sources, these individuals were detained while actively engaged in emergency response efforts as a result of work contracts being terminated with two firms.² While the recent press release from U.S. Customs and Border Protection attempts to frame this incident as a routine verification of contractor records following terminations, the outcome—armed enforcement officers detaining firefighters in the middle of an emergency response—makes clear that this quickly escalated beyond a matter of contract compliance. The two arrests and dozens of firefighters temporarily sidelined during an active wildfire raise questions about the priorities and judgement exercised by federal agencies.

We should not have to tell you that wildland firefighting is one of the most dangerous and critical public safety duties, especially during what has become one of Washington's largest active fires. The arrest of these hardworking crew members, who put their lives on the line to perform lifesaving duties, is not making our communities safer, no matter the rhetoric you use on TV. The Trump Administration's thoughtless and cruel immigration enforcement at any cost undermines coordinated emergency response efforts.

Standard emergency protocols are intended to shield first responders working in hazardous environments from enforcement interventions and we are concerned that these were not adhered

¹ Breda, I., & Swanson, C. (2025, August 28). Federal agents arrest firefighters working on WA wildfire. The Seattle Times. <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/climate-lab/federal-agents-arrest-firefighters-working-on-wa-wildfire/>.

² *U.S. Border Patrol Assists Bureau of Land Management near Lake Cushman on Olympic Peninsula in Washington State*. U.S. Customs and Border Protection. (n.d.-a). <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/us-border-patrol-assists-bureau-land-management-near-lake-cushman>.

to. Fire response was compromised while 44 firefighters were forced to stand in line to show their identification and answer questioning. This incident follows a pattern of lack of accountability for federal immigration enforcement officers.

Given the severity of this incident, I request your office provide the following information as soon as possible, and no later than September 12:

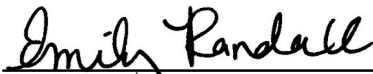
1. In 2021, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released a statement where the agency noted that they would refrain from immigration enforcement at “locations where disaster and emergency response and relief is being provided”, unless there are “exigent circumstances.”³
 - a. Is this policy still in place? If not, what internal guidelines are in place to ensure that agents refrain from law enforcement activities that could interfere with emergency response?
 - b. What specific exigent circumstances, if any, warranted the arrest of firefighters who were actively battling a 9,000-acre wildfire?
2. How do DHS, ICE, CBP and other federal agencies plan to support state and local firefighting agencies, if they plan to continue the abrupt interruption of lifesaving emergency response?
3. How will the actions of the agents involved be reviewed or overseen, and what processes are in place to ensure compliance with federal response protocol?
4. How were standard incident command protocols and interagency coordination applied, and what steps were taken to secure prior agency approval?
5. How does DHS plan to share findings from after-action reports or internal reviews assessing agent adherence to applicable standards during operations in emergency areas?
6. Where are the firefighters who were detained being held? Have these individuals been given a meaningful opportunity to communicate regularly with legal counsel?

Our communities—our residents, local governments, and first responders—deserve clear and immediate answers. Emergencies like wildfires demand collaboration and mutual support across agencies. The firefighters in question deserve respect, clarity, and assurance that their critical duties won’t be hindered by reckless enforcement actions. Arresting folks who risk their lives to protect public safety is not acceptable by any stretch of the imagination.

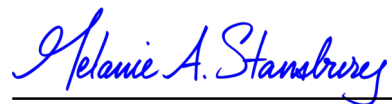
We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

³ *DHS statement on Safety and Immigration Enforcement during the 2021 wildfire season: Homeland security*. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (n.d.). <https://www.dhs.gov/archive/news/2021/07/17/dhs-statement-safety-and-immigration-enforcement-during-2021-wildfire-season>.



Emily Randall
Member of Congress



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



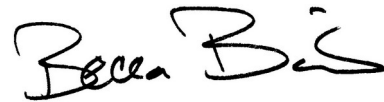
Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Greg Casar
Member of Congress



Becca Balint
Member of Congress



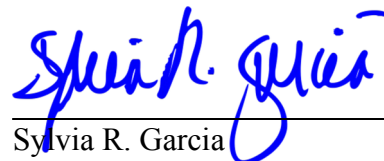
Maxine Dexter
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Chair
Congressional Hispanic
Caucus



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



Robert Garcia
Member of Congress



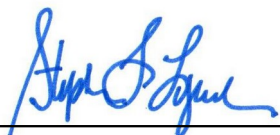
Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress



Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress



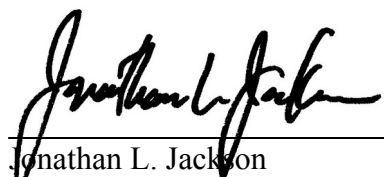
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress




Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Committee
on Natural Resources



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



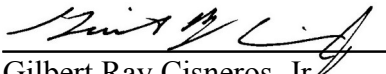
Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



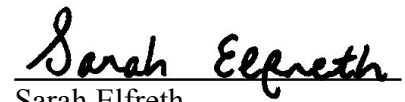
Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress




Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress



Gilbert Ray Cisneros, Jr.
Member of Congress



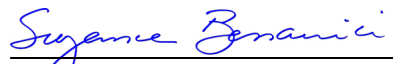
Sarah Elfreth
Member of Congress




Greg Stanton
Member of Congress



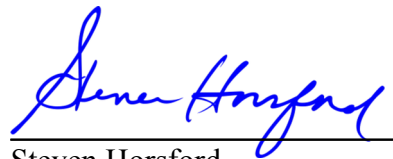
Rick Larsen
Member of Congress




Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress




Diana DeGette
Member of Congress




Steven Horsford
Member of Congress




Julia Brownley
Member of Congress




Robert J. Menendez
Member of Congress



Val Hoyle
Member of Congress



Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



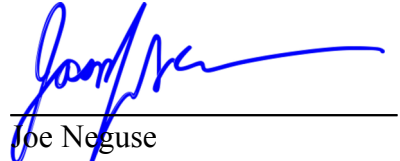
Derek T. Tran
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Luz M. Rivas
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress



Sam T. Liccardo
Member of Congress



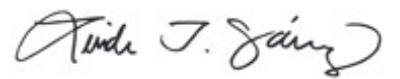
Pablo José Hernández
Member of Congress



Dave Min
Member of Congress



Laura Friedman
Member of Congress



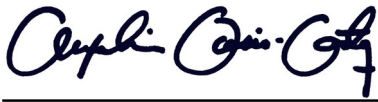
Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



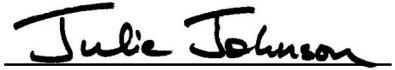
Raul Ruiz
Member of Congress



Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress



Julie Johnson
Member of Congress



Susie Lee
Member of Congress