

## Joe Abraham: Written Statement for the Record

House Judiciary Committee

The Human Toll of Sanctuary Policies: Stories from Victims and Families

Chairman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee,

Every parent in this room knows there are moments in life that split time in two—everything before, and everything after.

For me, that moment came on January 19, 2025.

Before that day, I was a father watching my children grow into adulthood, enjoying the simple privilege of seeing their lives unfold.

After that day, I became a father who buried his twenty-year-old daughter.

So before I begin, I want you to picture something ordinary.

A car sitting at a red light. Five young friends inside. Music playing. They're talking, laughing, enjoying a normal night together.

My daughter Katie was sitting in the back seat.

The car wasn't moving. They were stopped at a red light. Five friends sitting there, listening to music.

In a single instant, my daughter's life was gone.

Katie was riding in the back seat of a car with four friends when an intoxicated illegal immigrant slammed into the back of them at nearly 80 miles per hour.

They never saw it coming.

The crash crushed the car. Twisted metal everywhere. First responders worked to pull Katie's lifeless body from the wreckage.

He ran.

While first responders were fighting to pull my daughter from the wreckage, her killer was already running. He received help from numerous people along the way, aiding his escape from justice.

So much for coming here to better himself.

He was eventually captured in Milford, Texas, trying to flee the country and evade accountability for what he had done.

His name is Julio Cucul-Bol, a Guatemalan national who had already been deported once before.

Yet he was able to reenter the United States and live in sanctuary Illinois using a false identity during the Biden–Mayorkas administration.

Federal authorities were aware of him. But Illinois policies prevent meaningful cooperation with federal immigration enforcement.

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Those systems failed to work together.

If those systems had worked together... if the most basic safeguards had been in place... if our elected leaders had enacted sensible and safe immigration policies that properly vetted those entering this country... my daughter would still be alive today.

Katie was compassionate, funny, and incredibly sharp-witted. She had friends from many different backgrounds, loved people, and had a way of making everyone around her feel noticed and valued.

She was also a strong athlete. She played water polo and swam competitively through high school. She approached life with curiosity, energy, and kindness.

As a father, one of the greatest privileges of my life was watching my children grow into the adults they were becoming.

Katie deserved that future.

She deserved to graduate college, to chase a career, to fall in love, to experience the joys and heartbreaks of life like every young adult deserves.

She deserved decades of birthdays, holidays, and ordinary, beautiful moments with the people who loved her.

Instead, she is gone.

Bol was a 29-year-old man with no formal education. In both state and federal court, it was revealed that he could not speak, read, or write English—or even Spanish. His primary language is K'iche', a Mayan indigenous language from the mountainous regions of Guatemala.

Yet somehow, this man possessed a valid Illinois driver's license. A man who described himself as illiterate passed written and driving tests required to operate a vehicle in my state.

Bol, like many others entering our country under these conditions, was a single adult male who had already been deported once before. He was not a child. He was not a refugee fleeing immediate danger. And he was not someone who had followed the legal path that millions of immigrants before him have respected.

Nor was he working, seeking employment, or attempting to obtain language or literacy support that might allow him to function safely and responsibly in our society.

Bol, like many others, was not here to build a future. He was here using our country and my state as his personal playground and ATM machine, aided and abetted by the state of Illinois and the politicians who champion these reckless policies.

Bol is a man of poor character. His choices that night were reckless and unforgivable. But in one important respect, he was acting rationally.

He responded to the incentives placed in front of him.

When a country signals that its borders are porous, when deportations are ignored, when sanctuary policies promise protection from cooperation with federal authorities, and when

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identity verification and enforcement collapse, people with poor character will predictably take advantage of those conditions.

Those incentives are not just legal—they are also monetary. Generous taxpayer-funded benefits and services, combined with the low likelihood of enforcement, create a powerful signal that the rules of entry and residence no longer matter.

When someone has already crossed a border illegally, reentered after deportation, assumed a false identity, and violated multiple laws while living here, there is no reason to suddenly expect deference to the law at the moment when it matters most.

The rational response for someone of poor character in that environment is to continue doing what he had already been doing—ignoring the law.

The irrational behavior was not his.

The reckless behavior came from those entrusted with governing—leaders in Washington during the Biden–Mayorkas administration and leaders in Illinois, including J. B. Pritzker, who championed and defended sanctuary policies that removed guardrails and accountability at every stage.

My own family’s story is very different.

My parents immigrated legally to the United States from a third-world country. They came here for the right reasons. They did not come here to make claims on this country or to suggest that America somehow owed them something.

They came for the opportunity that America has always offered to those willing to work hard, follow the law, and contribute to the society they join.

They honored that opportunity.

They worked hard. They raised their family with respect for this country and its laws. They believed deeply in the idea that citizenship carries both rights and responsibilities.

Our family honored that social contract.

We are law-abiding citizens. We work hard. We pay the heavy taxes that are levied on us every year. We have tried to be productive members of our community and contributors to our country.

But that social contract was broken.

It was broken by the very government whose first responsibility is to keep its citizens safe.

This country spends trillions of dollars every year. My state spends billions every year. Yet somehow, the government cannot seem to do the most basic things expected of it: live within its means and protect the safety of its citizens.

That is failure at every level of government.

And while that failure continues, families like mine are left to carry the permanent consequences of those decisions—decisions made by people who will never bear the cost of them.

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After Katie's death, we also learned that while incarcerated, Bol was being treated for HIV—an infectious disease he had been living with in our communities. This is not a moral judgment. It is simply another example of a system with no guardrails—a system that failed everyone involved.

Katie's story is inconvenient to sanctuary policies. And that is exactly why Illinois' governor and policymakers, aided by a sympathetic or complicit media, try to make Katie and her story invisible—to erase the consequences of their failed policies and prevent accountability.

Governor Pritzker and many Illinois politicians often speak about compassion. Compassion matters.

But real leadership means judging policies not by intentions, but by outcomes.

Because intentions do not save lives.

Results do.

Without accountability, how can we hold our elected officials responsible for preventing the loss of innocent lives?

This is the paradox we face: a system that offers those in power a kind of immunity while leaving the public exposed. Such a system is broken by design. It cannot stand.

My daughter paid that ultimate price.

It has now been more than fourteen months since Katie's completely preventable death. And during that time, the leaders of my state—every single one of them—have remained silent about this case.

Silence is not neutral.

Silence is a choice.

And too often, silence is followed by something else—deflection.

What happened to my daughter must not be minimized or explained away with comparisons that miss the point.

When tragedies like hers are raised, the response too often becomes: “crime happens everywhere,” or “citizens commit similar acts.” Those statements may sound reasonable, but they are a false equivalence. They shift attention away from the only question that matters in this room:

Did decisions made by people in authority increase or decrease preventable risk?

Crime exists in every society. That is not the issue before you.

The issue before you is whether policy choices, enforcement failures, and gaps in oversight contributed to a death that could have been prevented.

Generalities do not answer that question.

Data does.

Transparency does.

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Accountability does.

Every preventable death deserves rigorous, case-specific examination. My daughter's life cannot be reduced to a statistic or a talking point used to protect a policy or shield a political reputation.

The question is not whether similar incidents occur somewhere else.

The question is whether this one could have been prevented.

Could better policies have stopped it?

Could better coordination have stopped it?

Could stronger safeguards have stopped it?

Those are the questions that matter.

And when innocent and defenseless people are harmed because leaders refuse to confront those questions—when they substitute tired platitudes for serious examination—that is not leadership.

That is a failure of leadership.

Public office carries a duty not just to acknowledge tragedy, but to confront its causes and fix what is broken.

So I ask this Committee to do the work that accountability requires.

Identify precisely what failed in this case.

Determine which policies or practices allowed that failure to persist.

Establish measurable changes to reduce the likelihood of it happening again.

And ensure ongoing oversight so those changes are real, not rhetorical.

Deflection does not protect the public.

Action does.

Transparency does.

Accountability does.

Katie was not a headline.

She was not a statistic.

She was my daughter.

She should be finishing school.

She should be planning her future.

She should still be laughing with her friends and arguing with her siblings.

Instead, her life ended in a crushed car at a red light.

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Her urn now sits in a room in our home built to remember her life—a room no parent should ever have to build.

I cannot bring Katie back.

If I could trade places with her, I would do it without hesitation. I would give every remaining day of my life just to give her one more.

She should still be here.

But she is not.

And because of the reckless decisions of people entrusted with public authority, something else was taken from me as well. I once looked forward to the later years of my life—watching my children grow older, watching their children grow, and enjoying the simple privilege of seeing my family continue forward.

That future was taken along with my daughter.

Today I find myself in a place I never imagined: indifferent to the length of my own life. When a child is taken through preventable failure, the years ahead lose their meaning.

The politicians responsible for these policies will never feel that loss.

They will never sit where I now sit.

They will never bury the child they were supposed to outlive.

Every parent in this country should ask themselves one question:

If this could happen to Katie, why couldn't it happen to your child?

This was not an unavoidable tragedy.

It was not fate.

It was preventable.

And the system that was supposed to protect her failed.

Katie received a death sentence that night.

Her family received a life sentence.

And the people whose policies helped make it possible will wake up tomorrow and go about their lives as if nothing happened.

Katie is gone.

But the consequences of those decisions will be carried by my family for the rest of our lives.