

Testimony for the Record - Dr. Giovanni Veliz, Retired Police Commander
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Border Security and Immigration
For the Hearing
Biden's Border Betrayal: Criminal Aliens in America
July 22, 2025

Chairman Cornyn, Ranking Member Padilla, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Good afternoon. My name is Gio Veliz. It is my honor and duty to appear before this committee to provide testimony on community policing and safer communities for all.

My academic and professional background aligns on the intersections of police legitimacy and building trust with immigrant communities. I am a retired Police Commander with over thirty years of law enforcement experience, during which I served in a variety of critical roles: patrol, investigative, and administrative. Administrative Sergeant to two different Chiefs of Police, United States Drug Enforcement (DEA) Task Force, Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) Task Force, Director of Police Activities League, and Police Commander of the Special Crimes Investigations Division.

I am best known in police reform circles for my work in strengthening trust and partnerships between law enforcement and community stakeholders, particularly within immigrant communities. My efforts have centered on safeguarding constitutional and human rights, improving police legitimacy, and fostering mutual understanding between officers and the communities they serve. My extensive experience in reducing crime in partnership with communities reflects years of sustained engagement, trust-building, and open communication – this approach supports both effective public safety and the safety of honorable sworn police officers who have taken an oath to protect communities with due process and dignity. Thus, my testimony today reflects my personal views and experience, and does not reflect the official positions of the Minneapolis Police Department.

Early in my career, I recognized the profound value of community relationships. By actively engaging with residents, local business owners, and attending countless community meetings, I gained insight into their needs and concerns. I was privileged to be welcomed by immigrant families and community leaders into spaces where I listened to the stories of perilous journeys to the United States – stories of hardship, resilience, and a yearning for safety and opportunity. These families often expressed fear of crime and reluctance to contact law enforcement, shaped by past experiences with abuse or unjust justice

systems. I learned much from these encounters, and they compelled me to reflect on the value of providing voice to the voiceless and treating every individual with dignity and respect.

In response to the call for stronger relationships with the immigrant community, I led initiatives in partnership with community stakeholders, including the creation of a multicultural advisory committee and the development of educational workshops tailored to immigrant communities. These workshops reached thousands of families, teaching them about police services and engaging them to build trust with police officers and help reduce crime in their neighborhoods. This program was showcased by the Community Oriented Policing Services magazine as a best practice to increase trust. The trust and cooperation generated through these efforts led to critical public safety outcomes, including information in major drug trafficking investigations, the rescue of a kidnapped community member, the apprehension of suspects in shootings, and successful large-scale fraud investigations involving organized crime in Minnesota and beyond.

I respectfully share my concern that the increased local law enforcement involvement in aggressive and fear-based raids of immigrant communities are already eroding trust, cooperation, and public safety in our neighborhoods. When residents fear law enforcement, their willingness to report crime, cooperate with investigations, or assist in identifying violent offenders is diminished. The erosion of trust not only undermines crime prevention efforts but also places both officers and community members at greater risk.

Trust between law enforcement and the communities we protect is vital and can only be achieved through community cooperation. My career as a law enforcement leader and lifelong advocate for justice has taught me this isn't just a buzz word, it's the key to achieving true public safety. Without community cooperation, police agencies across the country will have a difficult time identifying and apprehending violent offenders, this will more likely create risks on the safety of police officers and community members.

Today, I offer this testimony grounded in my experience – as a law enforcement leader, scholar, and lifelong advocate for justice and community partnership. I urge this committee to fully recognize the dangerous consequences to public safety these aggressive tactics present, and work together with community leaders and public safety experts to rebuild trust and keep our communities safe. Thank you.