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**Statement of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and
Bishop Steven Ullestad, Northeastern Iowa Synod of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

**Submitted to the House Education and Labor Subcommittee on Workforce Protection
May 20, 2008 Hearing on "ICE Workplace Raids: Their Impact on U.S. Children and Families"**

We are deeply concerned about the impact of immigration enforcement raids on children and families. A prime example of that impact can be seen in the aftermath of an enforcement raid by agents of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), an agency of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), on May 12, 2008 in Postville, Iowa. Bishop Steven Ullestad of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) attended high school in Postville, where his father served as pastor.

ELCA Designated Postville, Iowa, a Domestic Disaster

The ELCA has designated Postville as a domestic disaster, responding to the emotional trauma experienced by the community. This is the first time that the ELCA has designated an immigration matter a domestic disaster reckoning that the size and nature of the impact and trauma on children, families and the community is comparable to that of a natural disaster. St. Bridget's Catholic Church is the community crisis response center in Postville. Volunteers from the local St. Paul Lutheran Church and nearby Luther College and Wartburg College are contributing to the community wide legal, social services and pastoral response.

Postville, Iowa, has been a model community in many ways. It illustrates the positive role that immigration can have in revitalizing a local economy and the capacity of very diverse groups to live together in community. The town's population had declined to 800. Then Hasidic Jews from Brooklyn, N.Y., moved to Iowa and opened a kosher meat processing plant. With the subsequent migration of hundreds of immigrant workers from Guatemala, Mexico, Israel and Ukraine, the town was revitalized and the population tripled to nearly 2,300.

On May 12, 2008, Postville became a different kind of poster child. It now exemplifies the humanitarian and economic cost of our broken immigration system. In the largest raid of its kind in U.S. history, dozens of ICE agents descended upon Agriprocessors, the kosher meat processing plant, as two helicopters hovered outside. ICE arrested at least 313 men and 76 women and bused them to the Cattle Congress in nearby Waterloo, Iowa, for initial processing.

'Don't Take My Friends Away'

The impact on those arrested, their children and families, and the whole community is immediate and devastating. Adults were immediately separated from their children and families and detained. Parents, teachers, and Lutheran and other volunteers report disturbing signs of the impact. Following the raid, an estimated 65 percent of the Latino high school students and 90 percent of Latino students overall were absent from class. Some elementary classes shrunk from 25 children to six. One teacher estimates that at

Bringing New Hope and New Life

least 150 students are without one or both parents. Children wonder whether or when they will ever again see their arrested parent or parents. Children of U.S. citizen parents are also very traumatized by the action. These children are having nightmares about their own parents being taken away and they are creating drawings of the intervention with the words "Don't take my friends away." So far, only about a quarter of those in detention have been released to their families.

Beyond the children, the entire town feels the impact. Nearly half of the workers in the town's main industry are detained; over 10 percent of the town's total population. Those who were arrested were active members of the community: shopping in Postville businesses, renting property or buying houses, attending the school functions for their children, and being good neighbors. People in Postville are asking if our government gave any consideration to the impact on this small town before they took this action. There simply must be a more humane way of addressing the concerns about undocumented workers.

Most of the people picked up in the raid had charges related to using false identification to work. We do not condone people using false identification, but instead of arresting people, putting children at risk, tearing families apart and hurting local economies, we need to create viable means for hard workers to get documented. With the current system, there is a strong pull factor created because of the need for workers in the United States, and yet there are an extremely limited number of visas available.

The impact on Postville, Iowa, underscores the need for comprehensive reform of immigration policy. The immigration law needs to protect children and unite families, safeguard human rights and worker rights, enable marginalized undocumented people to come out of the shadows and to live without fear, and provide a path to permanence for those who have put down roots. In Postville children are being put at risk and families are being divided, there are serious allegations of workplace abuse, families are being driven even further into the shadows, and people with deep roots here are being detained and deported instead of integrated into the community. We need to fix the broken system.

Protection of Children and Families Must Be Primary in Any Enforcement Actions

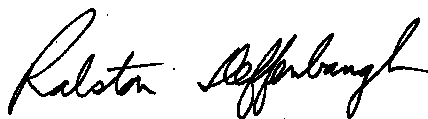
Meanwhile, we urge Congress to exercise rigorous oversight of workplace raids to assure that ICE does the following: 1) prioritizes and tailors the use of raids so that while addressing concerns of national security and/or danger to the community, ICE mitigates the sociological and economic impact, and emotional trauma on the community; 2) communicates and works closely with the community social service and pastoral care workers to mitigate the traumatic impact on children, families and the community; 3) facilitates access to legal counsel; 4) does not transfer people out of the area, but instead releases them from custody to go through their hearings outside of detention, and 5) develops streamlined communication mechanisms that allow family members and lawyers to locate those in detention.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. If you have questions or comments, please direct them to Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service through Greg Chen, director for legislative affairs, 202/626-7933, gchen@lirs.org.

Yours truly,



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