

**Written Testimony of Jessica Anne Gorman
Mother of Sheridan Grace Gorman
Before the Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement
Committee on the Judiciary
United States House of Representatives**

**Hearing: “Sanctuary Policies: Victims’ Perspectives”
June 30, 2026**

My name is Jessica Gorman. I am the mother of Sheridan Grace Gorman.

Sheridan was eighteen years old. She was a freshman at Loyola University Chicago. She was beautiful, funny, faithful, loving, and full of plans to build something with her life, to help people and make the world brighter.

On March 19th, 2026, Sheridan went with friends to the lakefront in Chicago because they hoped they might see the Northern lights.

She never saw those lights.

The man accused of murdering my daughter is Jose Medina, an illegal immigrant from Venezuela who should not have even been in this country. And even after committing a crime and having an outstanding warrant, he was left on the streets of Chicago to murder my innocent American child.

But this story is not about him.

This story is about my Sheridan.

It’s about how failed border policies, sanctuary-city laws and twisted leaders refusing to cooperate with ICE sent her to her grave.

It’s about a government and politicians that forgot their first priority.

And the question before this Committee is painfully simple:

When did protecting our American citizens stop being your first priority? And even more important – WHY did protecting our citizens stop being your first priority?

I want an explanation, I need one. I deserve one. But first I want you to know who Sheridan was.

I want you to understand what we ALL lost because of your mismatched priorities.

My husband and I have always joked that our older daughter, Madelon, is our pride, while Sheridan is our joy.

From the day she was born, Shera was pure energy, enthusiasm, laughter, and fun.

She was the kind of person who made every room brighter — and, usually, a little louder.

Which is why when Sheridan was in kindergarten, I remember going to her first parent-teacher conference a little nervous.

She was the sweetest little girl you could possibly imagine, but she was also the chattiest.

I remember sitting down across from her teacher, bracing myself, and asking with bated breath, “So... how’s my Sheridan?”

I'll never forget when the teacher looked at me very seriously and said, "I only have one thing to say to you."

Ugh! My stomach dropped.

Then she said, "Your Sheridan stalks the buddy bench."

I remember blinking at her. "I'm sorry, what?"

She repeated it: "Your Sheridan stalks the buddy bench."

Totally confused, I asked, "Um, is that a good thing or a bad thing? And what exactly is a buddy bench?"

Her teacher smiled and said, "It is a BEAUTIFUL thing."

She explained that they had a bench in the play yard. She said not all kids are as outgoing and confident as your Sheridan so the children were told that if they wanted to play, or if they felt lonely, left out, shy, or unsure of where to go, they could sit on the bench. Then the other children were told that if they saw someone sitting there, they should go over, talk to them, or ask them to play.

And apparently Sheridan, my tiny kindergartener, had appointed herself the guardian of that bench.

Every day at recess, instead of heading straight to the swings or joining in a game of kickball, my daughter hung back and hovered by a nearby tree just watching that bench and waiting just in case someone needed her.

The teacher said kids didn't even have a chance to fully sit down on that bench before Shera was rushing over to take their hand and pull them away to play. Girls, Boys, first graders or third graders, it did not matter to her.

If a child looked lonely, Sheridan went over.

If someone had no one to play with, Sheridan was there.

If someone felt invisible, Sheridan saw them.

That was my daughter.

That is who she was until the day she was cruelly stolen from us.

And I honestly cannot make sense of it.

I cannot make peace with it.

I cannot accept a world where the little girl who once stalked the buddy bench — the child who noticed the lonely, reached for the forgotten, and made room for the people everyone else missed — was forced to run for her life and was shot down in cold blood by someone who should never have even been here in the first place.

In what world does the child who spent her life making sure no one was lonely die terrified and alone on a pier in Chicago?

In what world does the girl who saw everyone become invisible to the people in power responsible for protecting her?

This cannot be explained away, and it cannot be buried beneath a list of unrelated issues. No other crisis changes the fact that my daughter is dead because a preventable failure was allowed to become a permanent loss.

This cannot be buried under your slogans, statistics, or excuses.

This cannot stand.

Because my daughter is not an exception to be managed.

She is not collateral damage.

She is not the cost of your compassion.

Please know that I am not here to attack immigrants.

So many people we love are immigrants. We support legal immigration. We honor people who come here the right way, follow the rules, respect our laws and culture, and contribute to this country.

Legal immigration is a beautiful part of the American story.

But legal immigration and illegal immigration are not the same thing.

And compassion is not chaos.

Compassion is not lawlessness.

And compassion for people entering this country illegally CANNOT come before the compassion for and the safety of our American citizens already here.

There is an old saying: when everything is a priority, nothing is a priority.

And too many of our leaders have forgotten their first priority.

The American people voted you into power. American citizens trusted you with authority. Your first duty is to us.

Our children.

Our families.

Our veterans.

Our elderly.

Our disabled.

Our American citizens – No, YOUR American citizens!

Only after we protect and care for our own people should we focus on bringing others in and even then, it must be done the right way.

Create lawful pathways. Vet people carefully. Welcome people who respect our laws and culture and want to build a life here the legal way.

But above all - DO NOT ask American families to pay for your contrived compassion with the lives of our children.

Do not hide behind statistics when I am sitting here without my child.

Because Sheridan is not a statistic.

She is not a rare exception to be explained away. I can't believe how many Angel families are out here – we don't hear about them, most of the press skips over their pain and loss because it doesn't align with their politically skewed agendas - it's downright despicable!

My Sheridan would be alive if the man accused of killing her had not been allowed to come into this country by the previous administration and if Chicago's sanctuary city policies hadn't allowed him to remain on our streets to kill.

Congress needs to act.

I understand that many of the reforms I am asking for are already reflected in the House Judiciary Committee's Shut Down Sanctuary Policies Act of 2026. I strongly support that effort. But I also urge Congress to ensure that any final legislation is broad enough, strong enough, and enforceable enough to prevent another family from sitting where mine sits now.

First, Congress should fully enforce and fully fund the Laken Riley Act. A public safety law without resources is only paper. ICE needs the officers, detention space, data access, court capacity, and operational support necessary to detain criminally charged illegal aliens before warning signs become funerals.

Second, sanctuary jurisdictions must be required to notify ICE before releasing an illegally present alien or otherwise removable noncitizen who has been arrested for or charged with serious criminal conduct. That should include violent crimes, weapons offenses, theft-related offenses, domestic violence, sexual offenses, crimes involving minors, human trafficking, drug trafficking, gang-related offenses, and any crime resulting in death or serious bodily injury.

Third, states and localities should be required to honor lawful immigration detainers, warrants, and custody-transfer requests in public safety cases. When a removable person is already in custody for criminal conduct, law enforcement should not be forced to release that person back into the community when federal authorities are prepared to take custody.

Fourth, federal law enforcement and public safety funding should be conditioned, to the fullest extent allowed by the Constitution, on cooperation with federal immigration authorities in cases involving criminal offenders and public safety threats. Taxpayers should not be forced to subsidize policies that block enforcement of federal law and place Americans at risk.

Fifth, Congress should require transparent public reporting. Every jurisdiction should publicly report how many ICE detainers, warrants, or notification requests it receives; how many it honors; how many it declines; what charges were involved; and whether the person was later rearrested or accused of additional crimes. The public should not learn the cost of sanctuary policies only after a citizen is dead.

Sixth, victims and families must have a civil remedy when sanctuary policies contribute to violent crime. I support legislation such as the Justice for Victims of Sanctuary Cities Act. If a jurisdiction refuses to honor a lawful DHS detainer or notification request and that refusal helps lead to a violent crime, victims and surviving families should be able to seek accountability.

Seventh, the federal government should have clear authority to prosecute certain murders committed in the United States by inadmissible or deportable noncitizens. Murder is usually prosecuted locally, but families should not be left entirely dependent on jurisdictions where politics, resources, or sentencing options may limit justice. I support legislation such as the Justice for Victims of Illegal Alien Murders Act.

Eighth, where the law, facts, Constitution, and evidence support it, prosecutors should pursue the most serious available penalties for the most heinous crimes, including capital crimes committed by aliens illegally present in the United States. This is not about vengeance. It is about justice, deterrence, and recognizing the gravity of a preventable loss.

Ninth, Congress should support legislation such as the Justice for American Victims of Illegal Aliens Act, which would allow unlawful immigration status to be considered as an aggravating factor in appropriate federal capital sentencing cases involving the murder of a United States citizen.

Tenth, final orders of removal must mean something. If a person has received due process and has no lawful right to remain in this country, removal should occur promptly. A system that issues orders but does not enforce them teaches the public that the law is optional.

Eleventh, immigration-related crimes and related criminal conduct must be prosecuted seriously, including illegal reentry after removal, document fraud, identity fraud, alien smuggling, human trafficking, illegal firearm possession, and violent crimes committed by persons unlawfully present.

Twelfth, catch-and-release practices must end. No person who enters unlawfully should be released into the United States without reliable identity verification, biometric and criminal background checks, gang and terrorism database checks, a reliable address and sponsor where applicable, and enforceable monitoring and appearance requirements.

Thirteenth, public safety vetting must be continuous. When a noncitizen is arrested, charged, fails to appear, violates release conditions, or is linked to weapons, gangs, violence, or repeated criminal behavior, that information must be shared between local law enforcement, courts, corrections, DHS, ICE, FBI, and other relevant agencies. The government has the technology to share information. What it too often lacks is the will.

Fourteenth, legal immigration must be improved. America should welcome people who follow the rules, submit to vetting, respect our laws, and want to contribute to this country. Lawful pathways should be orderly, timely, and honest. Immigration courts and asylum adjudication should be adequately staffed so legitimate claims are heard quickly and fraudulent or meritless claims are denied quickly.

Fifteenth, states and cities should not be allowed to create practical immunity from immigration enforcement. They are not required to become federal immigration agencies, but they should not be allowed to obstruct federal enforcement or prevent cooperation when criminal conduct and public safety are involved. There is a meaningful difference between not doing ICE's job and actively preventing ICE from doing its job.

Sixteenth, victims and surviving families should be notified and heard. When a violent crime involves a person unlawfully present in the United States, families should have access to basic information about immigration status, detainers, release decisions, custody transfers, and removal proceedings, subject to lawful privacy and prosecutorial limits. Families should not be kept in the dark while agencies trade responsibility behind closed doors.

Seventeenth, Congress should examine the specific failures in Sheridan's case. The public deserves to know what happened when Jose Medina entered this country. The public deserves to know what happened after his reported shoplifting arrest in Chicago. The public deserves to know whether any detainer, notice, warrant, communication, or request was made, honored,

ignored, or prevented by policy. The public deserves to know whether federal, state, county, or city officials had a chance to prevent this and failed to act.

This should not be controversial.

A nation has borders.

A government has laws.

And elected officials have a duty.

Their first duty is to protect the people they serve.

The Shut Down Sanctuary Policies Act of 2026 is an important step toward restoring that duty. But whatever Congress passes must have teeth. It must require cooperation in public safety cases. It must impose consequences for obstruction. It must protect victims and families. It must ensure that sanctuary policies cannot be used as a shield when American citizens are placed in danger.

Accountability must be complete.

I am asking for reform because I do not want another mother to sit where I sit.

I cannot stomach the thought of another family becoming an Angel family.

I do not want another child's name to become a hearing title, a memorial scholarship, a press release, or a political talking point after it is too late.

We hear constantly about compassion. But compassion has to be ordered. It has to be honest. It has to begin with the people our government is sworn to protect.

It is not compassionate to legal immigrants to erase the difference between those who waited, complied, and entered lawfully and those who ignored the rules.

It is not compassionate to police officers to prevent them from cooperating with federal partners.

It is not compassionate to communities to release dangerous offenders.

It is not compassionate to citizens to make them bear the risk of government's refusal to enforce the law.

And it is not compassionate to Sheridan.

Sheridan's life was worth more than a policy slogan.

Her future was worth more than a sanctuary ordinance.

Her safety was worth more than the political comfort of officials who prefer not to cooperate with ICE.

My daughter should be alive.

She should be finishing her freshman year. She should be laughing with her friends. She should be calling me with stories about college life. She should be making plans for her future.

Instead, we are planning memorials.

We are giving out scholarships and awards in her name.

We are learning how to speak about our child in the past tense.

And we are asking our government to do the one thing it should have done before we ever had to come here: Protect us and our children above all else.

So today, I bring this back to the buddy bench.

I think Congress needs one.

I think every governor, mayor, sanctuary-city official, and politician shifting blame and interest and hiding behind their slogans and talking points should have to sit on one.

Not behind a podium.

Not behind a press secretary.

Come sit on a simple bench.

The kind a lonely child would sit on when she needs someone to see her.

I challenge you all to sit there with me.

Take my hand.

Look me in the eye.

And explain it because I just don't understand.

Explain why people here illegally matter more than your American citizens.

Explain why sanctuary policies matter more than my Sheridan's life.

Explain why cooperation with ICE was too much to ask, but asking our American parents to bury their children is somehow acceptable.

Explain why the little girl who stalked the buddy bench was not protected by the politicians placed into power to protect her.

I want you to imagine that that little girl on the buddy bench, that innocent college freshman with a heart full of compassion and a head full of dreams that was gunned down by an illegal immigrant was your daughter not mine.

What if she was yours? Would you be deflecting, would you even hesitate for one second to act, to make changes?

My Sheridan spent her life choosing others.

Today, I am asking this Committee, our Congress, and our country to choose us.

Please choose the people you were elected to protect.

Please choose the child on the buddy bench.

Please choose Sheridan.

She was worth protecting.

She was worth saving.

And she was worth your brave vote.

I want to thank, among many others, President Trump, Dan Scavino, Karoline Leavitt, Congressman Mike Lawler, Speaker Mike Johnson, Majority Leader Steve Scalise, Chairman Jim Jordan, Senators John Barrasso, John Thune, Dave McCormick, and John Fetterman, Congressmen Ralph Norman and Brandon Gill, our own Assemblyman Matt Slater, Yorktown

Supervisor Ed Lachterman, the Illinois lawmakers, the podcasters, the journalists, the advocates, the mothers and fathers, and every single person who has had the courage to speak Sheridan's name.

Because every time you say her name, you give a piece of her back to us.

You remind the world that Sheridan was not a talking point.

She was not a statistic.

She was not a headline.

And she was never, ever a "random dead person."

She was our daughter.

She was Madelon's little sister.

She was Tom's baby girl.

She was and will always be my sweet sunshine, my Shera Grace.

And if the people who failed her would rather look away, then I am asking the rest of you to look right at her.

Say her name.

Tell her story.

Demand better.

Because Sheridan Grace Gorman should still be alive.

And no mother should have to stand where I am standing, begging elected leaders to value her child's life after it is already too late.

I thank you from the bottom of my broken heart.