

# House panel questions U.S. immigration raids

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WASHINGTON — Marie Justeen Mancha, an American citizen and high school student from Reidsville, Ga., told lawmakers Wednesday that she was terrified when four federal agents stormed into her house, screaming, "Police! Illegals!" A House panel was examining similar incidents in which U.S. citizens were questioned, detained or deported in raids over the past year.

"My heart just dropped," Mancha said. "When the tall man reached for his gun, I just stood there feeling so scared. I could've busted out in tears, but I had to be strong and hold it in."

Mancha, who was 15 years old at the time and alone in her home, testified before the House Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security and International Law, about the incident, which occurred in conjunction with a September 2006 Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid at a poultry plant in nearby Stillmore, Ga.

"I carry that fear with me every day, wondering when they'll come back," she said, in a heavy Southern accent.

Rep. Zoe Lofgren, a California Democrat who chairs the committee, said that she feared we have arrived in an era "where an overzealous government is interrogating, detaining and deporting its own citizens while treating non-citizens even worse."

Gary Mead, assistant director for detention and removal at ICE, told the panel that his agency has "never knowingly or intentionally detained or removed a U.S. citizen."

In the "highly unlikely" event that an ICE officer determines that a U.S. citizen has been mistakenly deported, ICE takes appropriate action to locate the citizen and ensure immediate repatriation to the United States at no expense to the person, he said.

In the past four years, ICE has detained more than 1 million people and deported only one U.S. citizen, he said. That person — Peter Guzman — told ICE agents that he was a Mexican citizen, Mead said.

Guzman's attorney, James Brosnahan, also testified before the committee. He described his client as "a person of limited mental capacity" and unable to read at more than a second grade level.

"They put him on a bus with \$3 ./. and he was a U.S. citizen," Brosnahan said.

After being deported to Mexico, Guzman wandered on foot over hundreds of miles for 89 days between Tijuana and Calexico and survived by begging and picking food from garbage, Brosnahan said.

Guzman's mother went to the morgues of Tijuana to see if she could find her son, he added.

Brosnahan said Guzman's detention was not an innocent mistake but the consequence of "policies, practices and procedures which rely upon racial and ethnic stereotypes to presuppose undocumented status."

Democrats on the committee grilled Mead about several cases. They said they were angry that he did not know certain facts, such as what percentage of people arrested by ICE in the past year were Hispanic. He could only say that those arrested were "predominantly Hispanic."

Rep. Luis Gutierrez, D-Ill., said he was upset that Mead was unaware of an incident in Chicago where, according to Gutierrez, about 100 Hispanic men of a certain age were detained by ICE agents in a mall. The agents were searching for four men who were allegedly engaged in an identity theft ring, he said.

Mead said that the agency does not detain people based on nationality.

"We deport people based on their legal status and their right to be here, not their color," he said. "We do not racially profile."

Mead said that ICE is reviewing its policies and procedures to determine if even greater safeguards can be put in place to prevent the rare instances when U.S. citizens are mistakenly arrested or deported. The review is expected to be completed within the next 60 days.

Rep. Steven King, R-Iowa, ranking member of the committee, objected to the hearing topic, saying that a few isolated instances have been exaggerated and that a problem does not exist with ICE detaining U.S. citizens.

He said ICE needs to focus on deporting the "12 to 20 million" illegal immigrants in the United States that should be removed, but are not. The Department of Homeland Security estimates there are 12 million illegal immigrants in the United States.

Mead said he could not comment on Mancha's case, because it is part of current litigation.

Mancha is one of the plaintiffs in a lawsuit against ICE that alleges that federal agents illegally detained, searched and harassed Latinos solely because of their appearance, in violation of their Fourth and Fifth Amendment rights.

The lawsuit was filed by the Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights organization based in Montgomery, Ala. It alleges that the agents did not limit the raid to the poultry plant in Stillmore, but fanned out across residential areas, stopping motorists, breaking into people's homes, and threatening people with tear gas and guns.

The suit was filed in Atlanta in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia.