

January 30, 2026

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Personal Statement Regarding Community Safety, Immigration Enforcement
Transparency, and Civil Rights**

The following statement reflects my personal views and experiences and does not represent the official position of Yamhill County CASA, its board, staff, or volunteers.

To my fellow community members,

I am a product of the American Dream built through immigration and sustained by generations of bravery, dedication, and grit.

In 1857, my father's paternal great-grandfather, a Jewish immigrant from Germany, opened a 1750 sq ft mercantile store at 137 Front Street in Portland after nearly a decade surviving the wilderness as an itinerant peddler in Southern Oregon and Northern California. His work ethic and commitment to community provided jobs to tens of thousands of Oregonians over five generations.

My mother's paternal grandfather is honored on the American Immigrant Wall of Honor at Ellis Island. His family fled starvation and brutal oppression in Scotland in the early twentieth century. He went on to open a welding and fabrication business in Salem, Oregon, and for decades he and his wife operated an informal soup kitchen out of their home, while raising a future U.S. Navy serviceman.

My maternal grandmother was a Canadian immigrant who fell in love with that same American sailor when he returned from the South Pacific in 1945.

My history is a rich tapestry of tenacity, service, and care for community. It is builders, nurses, teachers, innovators, and military service members. My history is built on immigration.

My story is not unique. The vast majority of Americans have a family history of immigration, and we are the product of our ancestors' ambition for the American Dream. Grit, dedication, and bravery are iconically American, and the diversity created through immigration is one of our greatest strengths.

On paper, U.S. immigration policy has improved since my ancestors arrived. Racial, ethnic, and national-origin restrictions have been eliminated. Pathways exist for lawful permanent residents, refugees, asylees, and people legalized under prior programs. Birthright citizenship is firmly established. Literacy requirements are standardized, modest, and include disability accommodations.

However, while policy has improved in theory, the practice of naturalization has become increasingly dangerous and inaccessible.

The *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996*, passed by a Republican-controlled Congress and signed by a Democratic president, legally fused immigration enforcement with naturalization. Deportable offenses expanded dramatically, discretion to forgive minor or old mistakes was stripped away, and immigration law shifted from corrective to punitive. As a result, lawful permanent residents can be detained, placed in removal proceedings, or deported simply for applying for citizenship.

Current law also requires applicants to demonstrate “good moral character.” While the phrase sounds benign, it is dangerously vague. It can encompass minor or decades-old conduct, non-criminal behavior, paperwork inconsistencies, or allegations without convictions. It is broadly discretionary and unevenly enforced.

Over the last decade, the path to citizenship has become even more unbearably steep. Processing times have ballooned from months to years, with some wait times extending beyond a typical human lifespan depending on country of origin. Fees have risen far beyond inflation. Requests for evidence are routine, interviews increasingly adversarial, and denials more common for technical rather than substantive reasons. This creates financial barriers, psychological stress, status instability, and fear of triggering enforcement.

When we move away from diversity toward a society that seeks to mold people who look the same, pray the same, and share similar life experiences, we bottleneck the future. Our Founding Fathers understood this. I call on our leaders to stand up for civil rights and defend our diversity.

Leaders must have the courage to reject funding or political pressure that comes with conditions harming the people they serve, and to trust that their communities will support and celebrate principled leadership. They must also have the courage to name what is plainly wrong. Diversity is one of the United States’ greatest strengths, and equity and inclusion are how we honor that strength and prevent the failures of our history from repeating.

Every immigrant deported without rational cause represents the loss of future business leaders, innovators, teachers, nurses, and members of our armed forces. It eliminates creative potential, stifles the American Dream, and undermines our global competitiveness.

This harm is not theoretical; it is happening now.

Globally, our allies increasingly question our motives and call out a lack of humanity in U.S. immigration practices. Nationally, we are encouraged to buy into an “us versus them” narrative that distracts communities from questioning why wealth and power continue to concentrate at the top.

Locally, tensions are rising. Residents look to leaders for transparency, unity, and reassurance of safety, yet too often lately are met with silence. Some claim they need more information. Some frame this as a partisan issue. Others undermine nonprofit leaders who attempt to fill the void left by governmental inaction.

I want to be clear: **I support the deportation of undocumented immigrants who are found guilty of violent crimes.** That is not what current enforcement data reflects.

In 2025, only about 7% of individuals arrested by Border Patrol or Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had been convicted of violent crimes, according to analyses by the Poynter Institute and the Cato Institute. Only 31% of individuals currently held in detention are reported to have any criminal record.

More alarmingly, at least 170 U.S. citizens were detained by ICE in 2025. While there are documented reports of individuals with lawful immigration status being detained, comprehensive public data on the frequency of wrongful detention has not been released.

Independent analyses show discrepancies between DHS and ICE arrest reports and independently compiled datasets, raising serious concerns about transparency and accuracy. The U.S. Government Accountability Office has found that ICE's public detention data excludes tens of thousands of individuals initially held in temporary facilities before transfer to long-term detention. When GAO recommended full reporting and public explanation of methodology, DHS declined.

For these reasons, **I call on every elected official serving my community to demand transparency:**

- Demand that ICE agents operating in Yamhill County confirm when an immigration arrest has occurred and release identifying information so next of kin can be notified.
- Demand that DHS follow GAO recommendations by fully reporting **all** detentions, making aggregate data publicly accessible, and clearly explaining reporting methodology.
- Demand that public detention statistics include clear breakdowns of citizenship and immigration status to ensure accountability and lawful enforcement.

Again, I support deportation for violent crimes. What we are witnessing instead raises serious concerns about constitutional protections afforded to citizens and non-citizens alike.

The Fourth Amendment prohibits unreasonable searches and seizures without individualized justification, and courts have long held that race alone does not meet that standard. The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits intentional racial discrimination by government actors.

Based on documented detention patterns locally and nationally, ICE enforcement practices appear to have crossed constitutional boundaries through racially discriminatory conduct. While the Supreme Court's decision in *Noem v. Vasquez Perdomo* temporarily shields certain enforcement actions, many documented behaviors go beyond racial profiling and reflect clear discrimination and prejudice. In a county with a strong Latino community and a documented history of bias, these practices, combined with inaction from local leaders, have created a powder keg of fear.

Elected officials have a duty to promote safety and protect civil rights. This includes providing unbiased, factual information on official platforms; posting notices regarding judicial warrant requirements; and offering clear guidance for residents who witness detentions or encounter abandoned vehicles.

Local law enforcement should also respond to emergency calls involving active detentions, not to interfere with federal officers, but to ensure the safety of witnesses, protestors, and bystanders.

Children are the most vulnerable members of our community. **Schools must remain places of safety.** While cities may not regulate airspace, they do control where drones can take off and land. Allowing drones to be launched near schools for surveillance sets a dangerous precedent that threatens domestic violence survivors, children in foster care, and others vulnerable to coercive control.

I strongly urge local officials to prohibit drone takeoff and landing within school zones without prior school district approval.

Finally, community tension is real, and fear spans political lines. **Participating in an economic impact survey assessing workforce, housing, and service disruptions related to immigration enforcement is a meaningful act of transparency.** It will help our community understand real impacts and evaluate leadership decisions during this moment of crisis.

I call on local officials to invest in the American Dream, honor the grit and dedication of their constituents, and protect diversity as one of our greatest strengths.

With gratitude and sincerity,

Sarah Johnson