

Office of the Director

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20536



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

The Honorable Joni K. Ernst
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Ernst:

Thank you for your March 24, 2016 letter to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The death of Sarah Root is heartbreaking. Like you, I mourn her family's loss. I am committed to learning from this incident and ensuring that all of the men and women of ICE, myself included, make the best decisions we can.

Simply put, Edwin Mejia should be in custody. ICE officers are entrusted to look at the circumstances of each case and made a judgment call based on the facts and the agency's policies and procedures. At the time of his release by the county court, Mr. Mejia had not yet been convicted of a criminal offense. However, Secretary Johnson's November 20, 2014 memorandum, *Policies for the Apprehension, Detention and Removal of Undocumented Immigrants*, makes clear that immigration officers may pursue the removal of any alien where to do so would serve an "important federal interest," regardless of whether the alien falls into the specific priority categories. Under the circumstances of this case, further immigration enforcement action against Mr. Mejia would have served such an interest. I have made it clear to the ICE field offices that similarly situated aliens should be subject to enforcement action even if such aliens do not fall within the delineated priority categories, and the Secretary has reiterated this as well. I believe we could have done things differently to help ensure Edwin Mejia faces justice. I am committed to ensuring he does so. ICE continues to work with the Omaha Metro Fugitive Task Force to locate and apprehend him. We have also referred this matter to our Attaché in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, who is working with the Honduran Government to assist in locating Mr. Mejia.

I have provided responses to each of your specific questions in the enclosure. Thank you again for your letter. A separate, identical response has been sent to the Senators who co-signed your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel H. Ragsdale".

Daniel H. Ragsdale
Deputy Director

Enclosure