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July 29, 2025

Colonel Oscar Perez  
Chief of Police  
Providence Police Department  
235 Washington Street  
Providence, RI 02903

VIA EMAIL AND MAIL

Dear Chief Perez:

I am writing in response to the controversial and highly publicized Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) action that took place on Alverson Avenue in Providence on July 13, 2025. This incident has, for understandable reasons, generated a great deal of attention and concern, including a call by ten City Council members for review of the incident by the Providence External Review Authority (PERA).

Having watched the only police body-worn camera (BWC) footage of the incident that has thus far been publicly released, as well as two additional officer recordings we obtained through an open records request, we believe it is essential that the police department promptly release all other BWC footage from officers who were at the scene, and review other aspects of their role in the incident and their compliance with department policies.

First, I want to acknowledge — based on the limited BWC footage that has been released thus far — the legitimacy of a number of points that you made at your news conference addressing the incident. It seems clear that Providence police arrived on the scene of this ICE interaction only because they were responding to reports of a traffic accident, and not with any goal of participating in an ICE arrest. It also seems evident that the Providence police officers on the scene had a sincere interest in trying to help protect individuals gathering on the street and evacuate residents from the house where the ICE target was present.

At the same time, other troubling facts emerge from a review of the released footage. Regardless of the initial intent of Providence police in not collaborating with ICE — a prohibition contained both in city ordinance and police department policy and a principle that I know you support — officers inescapably found themselves inextricably aiding ICE by maintaining a presence on the scene long after the traffic accident was addressed.

For instance, one officer on the video can be heard telling ICE agents, “We’ll help you,” while calling on the ICE agents to be the ones to physically grab the target. The officer whose BWC footage was publicly released also can be seen assisting ICE in various ways, such as reviewing photos of the target and advising agents of his conversations with the landlord about the

target's presence in the home. A recent news article concisely summarizes various acts of assistance that can be gleaned from this recording, and which, taken as a whole, cannot be summarily written off as merely acts of de-escalation.<sup>1</sup> Rather, these interactions constitute assistance, even if they may have happened only accidentally or secondarily. While the assistance may have been inadvertent, we believe this incident points to the department's need to provide more detailed training to officers on how to address these situations of unintended contact with ICE, since similar encounters are likely to arise in the future.

The assertion that there was no cooperation is undermined by another facet of the released BWC footage: there are significant periods of time when the BWC recordings of conversations between the police and ICE agents are muted. Specifically, there is an 11-minute audio gap in the publicly released video as that officer talks with ICE agents on the scene.<sup>2</sup> An even longer audio silence – over 36 minutes long – is present during another conversation between an officer and ICE agents in one of the additional BWC recordings we obtained. In the absence of a record of those conversations, we do not know how one can claim definitively that officers were not providing, or offering to provide, assistance to the agents.

To the contrary: according to your department's BWC policy, an officer is allowed to mute their BWC only "if it becomes necessary to discuss issues surrounding an investigation with a supervisor or another officer in private," which in this instance would mean only if the officer and agents were discussing details of the ICE action. The policy also requires an officer, before muting the device, to first "record on the camera the reason for the interruption." However, no explanations were verbalized by the officers in these instances before turning off their audio, leaving one to speculate on the nature of the conversations.

It is also important to briefly address the issue of de-escalation, which you emphasized in your comments on the incident. We appreciate the point you have made in describing the officers' role in that context, but it is extremely disconcerting to realize that, to the extent that the Providence police stayed to deescalate the situation, it was primarily to protect the public from ICE and not the other way around.<sup>3</sup> Unless Providence police plan to routinely shadow ICE interactions in the city to prevent the misuse of force, unwarranted confrontations with the public, or other abuses from these federal agents, your department should be condemning these tactics, both publicly and privately, and demanding de-escalation from ICE itself while conducting any enforcement actions in the city. Absent your establishment of clearer boundaries, virtually any Providence police cooperation with ICE will be able to be excused as "de-escalation."

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<sup>1</sup> "'We'll help you': Body camera video raises questions about Providence police cooperation with ICE," Steph Machado, *Boston Globe*, July 16, 2025. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/07/16/metro/providence-police-body-camera-video-ice-immigration>.

<sup>2</sup> The recording is also briefly muted beginning at 28:07. Other video footage taken by a person in the house documents that the officer was calling the name of the target in an effort to get him to voluntarily come down the stairs. While the officer may have muted the audio for privacy reasons, this brief interaction raises further questions about the role of Providence police in aiding ICE.

<sup>3</sup> "Crossing the line? Providence police navigate public safety and ICE involvement," Mark Reynolds, *Providence Journal*, July 24, 2025. <https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/crime/2025/07/24/providence-police-tactics-in-ice-raid-stir-citywide-controversy/85330677007>. As you stated in the article, "At the end of the day, any information exchanged between officers and the agents was *only done to help protect bystanders* and to prevent confusion or unintended consequences." (emphasis added)

Hopefully, the release of BWC footage from other officers will shed more light on this matter. Perhaps there is a legitimate explanation for the audio recording lapses that does not in any way suggest police-ICE cooperation. But it is important to stress that, rather than definitively resolving the issue of whether Providence police improperly assisted ICE, the BWC recordings released thus far raise as many questions as answers.

Unfortunately, I think it is fair to expect that ICE actions like this are only going to become more, not less, prevalent in the city in the coming months. Thus, it is all the more crucial that police officers understand their limits in interacting with ICE agents in accordance with Providence statutory and administrative policy. As you noted at the news conference, community trust hangs in the balance.

In sum, we ask that you (1) provide clarification on how police officers should respond in the future when encountering chance meetings with ICE during their operations; (2) address the legitimacy of the muted BWC recordings; and (3) release as soon as possible the BWC footage of the other officers who were on the scene.

Finally, we would suggest that you also consider clarifying your department's General Order on "Immigration Policies and Procedures." While it, like the city ordinance, bars officers from "*comply[ing] with requests* by other agencies to support or assist in operations conducted solely for the purpose of enforcing federal immigration law," it might be helpful to specify that officers cannot initiate offers of assistance on their own either.

Thank you in advance for considering our views on this important issue, and I look forward to hearing back from you about them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven Brown", with a stylized, flowing script.

Steven Brown  
Executive Director

cc: The Hon. Brett Smiley, Mayor  
Jeffrey Dana, City Solicitor  
Providence City Council  
Ferenc Karoly, PERA