

The Honorable Alex Padilla
US Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
Via Electronic Service

August 21, 2025

Dear Senator Padilla,

On behalf of the Sikh Coalition, the nation's largest Sikh civil rights organization, we are writing to express our support for the VISIBLE Act (S.2212), and to extend our gratitude to you for leading on this important initiative.

By way of background, the Sikh Coalition was founded in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, in response to a torrent of hate crimes, discrimination, profiling, and bullying against members of the Sikh religious community throughout the United States. Our mission since then has been to work towards a world where Sikhs and other religious communities in America can freely practice their faith without bias and discrimination.

Like many others, we have been alarmed by reports of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents detaining individuals (undocumented and otherwise) across the country while failing to provide them with opportunity to speak with counsel or notify relatives, or without providing public record of their detention or whereabouts. Detainees have even been deported to third-party countries like El Salvador or Libya, in some cases without a hearing and/or on the basis of perfunctory "evidence." Experts have equated some of ICE's practices to enforced disappearances,¹ defined by the United Nations as the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or

¹ "The U.S. Government is Forcibly Disappearing Migrants," Human Rights First, May 2025, <https://humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Forcibly-Disappearing-Migrants-factsheet-formatted-5.1.25v2.pdf>; Emily Witt, "The People Being Disappeared by ICE in Los Angeles," The New Yorker, June 22, 2025, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-los-angeles/the-people-being-disappeared-by-ice-in-los-angeles>; "Urgent Human Rights Complaint Submitted After ICE 'Disappears' 48 New Mexico Residents, ACLU-NM, March 17, 2025, <https://www.aclu-nm.org/en/press-releases/urgent-human-rights-complaint-submitted-after-ice-disappears-48-new-mexico-residents>.



by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law.²

Our concern with this trend is exacerbated by the similarities between ICE’s actions now and the thousands of enforced disappearances and other human rights violations targeting Sikhs in Punjab, India, between 1984 and 1995.³ These disappearances were ostensibly conducted as part of government counterinsurgency operations, but they followed on the heels of—and are inexorably connected to—the Sikh Genocide of 1984. According to human rights organization Ensaaf, these enforced disappearances often began with victims being illegally detained in front of their family or other witnesses.⁴ Law enforcement did not officially acknowledge the detentions, provide detainees families with information about the detentions, or present the detainees before magistrates within 24 hours as required by Indian law.⁵ We cannot help but observe the similarities between our own community’s experience and the recent accounts of individuals here in the United States who have watched their neighbors, friends, and family members be carried away in unmarked vans,⁶ arrested by masked agents,⁷ or disappeared for weeks with no trace, failing to show up in the government’s records of detentions and deportations.⁸

As the Sikh community pauses to commemorate the life and legacy of Bhai Jaswant Singh Khalra, a Sikh human rights defender who was murdered by Punjab police 30 years ago this September for his work to study and publicize enforced disappearances, we are reminded that our historical struggle and oppression do not exist in a vacuum. It is incumbent upon us to heed our community’s experience, and to take a stand as we see the same unconscionable oppression that we have endured rear its head now, in the United States and against vulnerable persons. For this reason, we are glad to endorse the VISIBLE

² “About Enforced Disappearance,” United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-disappearances/about-enforced-disappearance>.

³ Romesh Silva, Jasmine Marwaha, and Jeff Klingner, “Violent Deaths and Enforced Disappearances During the Counterinsurgency in Punjab, India: A Preliminary Quantitative Analysis,” Ensaaf and the Benetech Human Rights Data Analysis Group, Jan. 26, 2009, <https://ensaaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ViolentDeathsReport-Cover.pdf>.

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Emily Witt, “The People Being Disappeared by ICE in Los Angeles,” *The New Yorker*, June 22, 2025, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-los-angeles/the-people-being-disappeared-by-ice-in-los-angeles>.

⁷ Josh Landes, “ICE Agents Detain at Least 10 Berkshire Community Members in Sweep,” <https://www.wamc.org/news/2025-03-21/unprecedented-crackdown-sees-ice-agents-detain-at-least-10-berkshire-community-members-in-sweep>.

⁸ Miriam Jordan, “A Venezuelan Is Missing. The U.S. Deported Him. But to Where?” *The New York Times*, April 22, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/22/us/venezuela-immigrant-disappear-deport-ice.html>.



Act, and are broadly supportive of efforts by your office and others throughout the U.S. Congress who have advanced similar policy proposals to require that ICE conduct its enforcement operations with transparency, accountability, and hard limits on their rapidly growing power.

Please do not hesitate to let us know if we can be of assistance to your office in moving this legislation forward or lending the Sikh community's historical context to conversations around this kind of policy reform. Thank you again for your principled leadership on this matter.

Best regards,



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