

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 16, 2026

Pete Gerken
Commissioner
Lucas County Commissioners
1 Government Center
Toledo, OH 43604

Dear Commissioner Gerken,

I write today to express my sincere disgust regarding the dangerous public comments you made about our brave men and women in uniform at a Lucas County Commissioners' meeting on January 13, 2026.¹ Specifically, you stated, "I think DHS, ICE, and border patrol have gone from a legitimate, in the past, law enforcement agency, to a terrorist group."²

Your statements were made in connection with the even more incoherent and perilous choice to rescind the Lucas County Commissioners' prior agreement to accept a \$70,000 grant from the Department of Homeland Security's Operation Stonegarden program.³ These federal funds improve critical infrastructure in Lucas County, which makes the county safer for its citizens.⁴ According to Lucas County's own Sheriff, the county has received and accepted such funds for nearly two decades. From Toledo Public Schools' approximately \$70 million budget deficit⁵ and Sheriff Navarre's plea for a \$6.57 million budget increase to address law enforcement staffing shortages,⁶ your decision to refuse federal assistance is particularly confounding when the financial situation in the county, which directly impacts Lucas County citizens' basic services, is dire.

Even worse, rather than apologize, you publicly justified your comments and horrific decision, "I thought it was time for someone on our committee to speak up and say look, for \$70,000 I don't think we want to take money from an organization that has delegitimized itself."⁷

¹Gerald Harris, *Lucas County commissioners reject DHS grant, Gerken likens ICE to "terrorist group"*, WTVG 13 ACTION NEWS, Jan. 13, 2026, <https://www.13abc.com/2026/01/14/lucas-county-commissioners-reject-dhs-grant-gerken-likens-ice-terrorist-group/>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Gerald Harris, *TPS to hold community meetings on district changes due to funding cuts, new board leadership elected*, WTVG 13 ACTION NEWS, Jan. 6, 2026, <https://www.13abc.com/2026/01/07/tps-hold-community-meetings-about-possible-changes-district-due-budget-shortfalls/>.

⁶ Alex Bracken, *Sheriff request \$6.6M increase in 2026 budget, cites staffing struggles*, THE BLADE, Oct. 25, 2025, <https://www.toledoblade.com/local/police-fire/2025/10/08/sheriff-requests-6-6m-increase-in-2026-budget-cites-staffing-struggles/stories/20251007102>.

⁷ Gerald Harris, *Lucas County commissioners reject DHS grant, Gerken likens ICE to "terrorist group"*, WTVG 13 ACTION NEWS, Jan. 13, 2026, <https://www.13abc.com/2026/01/14/lucas-county-commissioners-reject-dhs-grant-gerken-likens-ice-terrorist-group/>.

Your irresponsible rhetoric and decisions are wholly inconsistent with the duties that you swore a constitutional oath to uphold.⁸ In fact, it is your legal responsibility for example, to “work with all county elected officials and with judges to assure that they are properly funded to perform their statutory duties.”⁹ Ohio Revised Code 3.07 states that “any person holding office...in this county...who refuses or willfully neglects to enforce the law or to perform any official duty imposed on him by law...is guilty of misconduct in office.” Your egregious designation of heroic federal law enforcement personnel as “terrorists” and your decision to refuse federal funds to support the critical infrastructure your Sheriff is begging for likely violated more than just Lucas County citizens’ trust and faith in you as an elected official.¹⁰

This type of venomous language has led to federal law enforcement personnel being murdered in the line of duty where gunmen label their bullets “ANTI-ICE,”¹¹ the encouragement of domestic terrorist attacks,¹² including Molotov cocktail attacks on ICE and CBP officers,¹³ an overall 3,200 percent surge in vehicular attacks against ICE agents¹⁴ and a more than 1,150 percent increase in assault and violence against ICE officers.¹⁵ Your disgusting declaration and decision to not fund critical criminal justice and safety infrastructure in Lucas County is not only an embarrassment but will likely lead to more violence against law enforcement personnel and result in even more danger posed by illegal immigrants to the community than the region has already suffered through.¹⁶

I find it extremely ironic that previously you publicly called for President Trump “to be respectful toward the local community.” Yet, you yourself, in a public meeting, called federal law enforcement officers, who sacrifice so much to uphold our laws and keep our communities safe, “terrorists.” Although your unhinged conduct, which is wholly unfit for someone holding public

⁸ R.C. 107.01.

⁹Ohio County Commissioners Handbook, COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO, https://ccao.org/aws/CCAO/asset_manager/get_file/713112?ver= (last visited Jan. 14, 2026) at 3.

¹⁰ R.C. 3.07.

¹¹ Rich Matthews and Andrew Hay, *Gunman wrote ‘ANTI-ICE’ on unused bullet in fatal attack on Dallas immigration office*, REUTERS, Sept. 25, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/three-injured-shooting-ice-facility-dallas-local-media-reports-2025-09-24/>.

¹² S.E. Jenkins, *5 Plead guilty to terrorism-related charges in case tied to alleged attack at North Texas ICE facility*, CBS NEWS, Nov. 19, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/texas/news/5-plead-guilty-texas-july-4-ice-facility-attack/>.

¹³ Press Release, The United States Department of Homeland Security, DHS Announces Arrest of Serial Criminal Behind Molotov Cocktail Attack on ICE and CBP Officers in Los Angeles (June 27, 2025), <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/06/27/dhs-announces-arrest-serial-criminal-behind-molotov-cocktail-attack-ice-and-cbp>.

¹⁴ Bonny Chu, *Ice agents report ‘unprecedented’ 3,200% surge in car attacks last year*, FOX NEWS, Jan. 8, 2026, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/ice-agents-report-unprecedented-3200-surge-car-attacks-last-year>.

¹⁵ Press Release, The United States Department of Homeland Security, Sanctuary Politicians’ Rhetoric Fuels More Than 1,150% Increase in Violence Against ICE Law Enforcement (Nov. 24, 2025), <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/11/24/sanctuary-politicians-rhetoric-fuels-more-1150-increase-violence-against-ice-law>.


¹⁶ Stephan Sorace, *Venezuelan man posing as teen in Ohio high school pleads guilty*, FOX NEWS, Sept. 24, 2025, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/venezuelan-man-posing-teen-ohio-high-school-pleads-guilty>.

office, should not be surprising as you clearly have a pattern of engaging in disrespectful behavior and misconduct yourself that you teach and encourage in others as well.¹⁷

Please respond to my office not later than five days from receipt of this letter with answers to the following questions:

- (1) What is the total amount and percentage of federal funds included in the Lucas County budget?
- (2) Is calling federal law enforcement personnel “terrorists” at a public meeting consistent with your statutory duties as county commissioner?
- (3) Is refusing to fund critical infrastructure, safety, and security projects requested by your county sheriff consistent with your statutory duties as county commissioner?
- (4) Do you think calling federal law enforcement personnel “terrorists” is “respectful”?
- (5) Do you believe the citizens of Lucas County will benefit from the withholding of all federal funds?

Sincerely,



BERNIE MORENO
United States Senator

¹⁷ Mike Sigov, *County commissioner accused of cursing at Trump supporters*, THE BLADE, Jul. 30, 2019, https://www.toledoblade.com/local/politics/2019/07/30/county-commissioner-pete-gerken-accused-foul-language-trump-supporters-toledo/stories/20190730148?fbclid=IwY2xjawPUg41leHRuA2FlbQlXMQBicmlkETF3YmRXVkJNbnTkIMQVN0U1VCc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHjDdPXNhqL-VhwwdEScn2NfMBKYovgfdyA9KAAQ_Cbo2La8BMLGKUITbdUs_aem_r93NrbtKPDZQSOg12sOvQQ; David Aaro, *Daughter of Ohio Democrat charged with shouting slurs, reporting cops at Trump rally*, FOX NEWS, Jan. 15, 2020, <https://nypost.com/2020/01/15/daughter-of-ohio-democrat-charged-with-shouting-slurs-resisting-cops-at-trump-rally/>.