



## Iowa politicians, Sarah Root's mother call for tougher action on immigration

Nancy Gaardner

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As news spread that the man suspected of killing Mollie Tibbetts was in the country illegally, calls began almost immediately for tougher action on immigration, and President Donald Trump used the case in a direct partisan appeal.

Iowa's Gov. Kim Reynolds and the state's two U.S. senators issued statements that shared in the grief of the Tibbetts family but also said more must be done on immigration.

Tibbetts, 20, disappeared July 18 while jogging in the rural Iowa community of Brooklyn. On Tuesday, authorities announced the arrest of a 24-year-old man who they say abducted and killed Tibbetts: Cristhian Bahena Rivera, who has been in the country illegally for at least four years. He lived and worked in the area where Tibbetts disappeared.

In a joint statement, U.S. Sens. Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst said no family should have to endure such a tragedy, "especially one that could have been prevented."

"Too many Iowans have been lost at the hands of criminals who broke our immigration laws. We cannot allow these tragedies to continue," they wrote.

In her statement, Reynolds said the state's residents demand action.

"As Iowans, we are heartbroken, and we are angry. We are angry that a broken immigration system allowed a predator like this to live in our community, and we will do all we can (to) bring justice to Mollie's killer," she wrote.

Ernst and Grassley highlighted their co-sponsorship, with Nebraska's U.S. Sens. Ben Sasse and Deb Fischer, of "Sarah's Law." The legislation is not targeted broadly at all immigrants who are in the country illegally. Instead, it would require U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to take custody of immigrants who have been charged with a crime resulting in death or serious bodily injury.

The law is named for Sarah Root, a 21-year-old Council Bluffs woman who died in a crash in Omaha after being hit by a man who authorities say was in the country illegally. Police say that Eswin Mejia, a 19-year-old immigrant from Honduras, had been drunk and drag-racing when he crashed his pickup truck into Root's car in January 2016. Mejia disappeared after posting bail.

Root's mother, Michelle Root, said Tuesday that she is frustrated that more hasn't been done to enforce the nation's immigration laws.

“That’s another innocent life taken that could have been prevented,” she said of Tibbetts’ slaying. “I don’t understand how many more lives need to be lost. My heart is just broken for this family.”

Root’s death became a touchstone nationally for frustration over immigration, and Trump mentioned it in his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in 2016.

Tuesday, Trump told supporters during a speech that Tibbetts’ death was a call to elect Republicans to fix “bad” immigration laws.

“You heard about today with the illegal alien coming in, very sadly, from Mexico,” Trump said. “And you saw what happened to that incredible, beautiful young woman. It should have never happened, illegally in our country.”

Trump has made further crackdown on illegal immigration a core policy of his administration. He often has claimed widespread crime by people living in the country illegally, citing among other things the indictments of 11 suspected MS-13 gang members from El Salvador charged in connection with the slayings of two Virginia teens. Trump also has held events at the White House with members of “angel families,” whose relatives were killed by immigrants.

Although Trump claims legal U.S. residents are less likely to commit crime, several studies from social scientists and the libertarian think tank Cato Institute find that isn’t accurate and that states with a higher share of people living in the country illegally have lower violent crime rates.