

April 2, 2021

Dear President Biden, Vice President Harris, and Secretary Mayorkas,

We, the 196 undersigned organizations, call on this administration to begin the long overdue process of phasing out the use of detention from our immigration system. Immigration detention is abusive, deadly, immoral and wholly unnecessary. Ending it must be at the center of this administration's plans to relieve immigrant communities from decades of a harmful, enforcement-only approach to migration. Detention is an integral cog in the United States' deadly immigration enforcement machinery with over 200 facilities across the country, but it does not have to be this way. People navigating their immigration cases can and should be able to do so in community with their loved ones--not behind bars in detention. This administration has the power to build a just system and make freedom for all immigrants a reality.

**We demand that the Biden administration phase out Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) detention system, starting by immediately shutting down the following ten detention centers that are emblematic of a system that is rotten to its core:**

1. Adelanto Detention Center (Adelanto)
2. Berks County Family Detention Center (Berks)
3. South Texas Family Detention Center (Dilley)
4. Etowah County Jail (Etowah)
5. Farmville Detention Center (Farmville)
6. T. Don Hutto Detention Center (Hutto)
7. Irwin County Detention Center (Irwin)
8. Karnes County Family Detention Center (Karnes)
9. Mesa Verde Detention Center (Mesa Verde)
10. Otero County Detention Center (Otero)

The abusive history of ICE detention is well-documented,<sup>1</sup> and includes rampant medical neglect,<sup>2</sup> mental, physical and sexual abuse,<sup>3</sup> scarcity of food and other basic necessities,<sup>4</sup> retaliatory and violent

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on each of the listed facilities, see: Ghandehari, Setareh; Suarez, Luis; Viera, Gabriel. "First Ten to Communities Not Cages." Detention Watch Network. Feb. 2021. <https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/sites/default/files/reports/DWN%20First%20Ten%20to%20Communities%20Not%20Cages.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Blunt, Mitch. "Systemic Indifference: Dangerous & Substandard Medical Care in US Immigration Detention." May 8, 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/05/08/systemic-indifference/dangerous-substandard-medical-care-us-immigration-detention>.

<sup>3</sup> Detention Watch Network. "Expose & Close." Nov. 2012. <https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/pressroom/reports/2012/expose-and-close>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security. "ICE Detention Facilities Failing to Meet Basic Standards of Care." Sept. 21, 2020. <https://homeland.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Homeland%20ICE%20facility%20staff%20report.pdf>.

practices by facility guards,<sup>5</sup> and even death.<sup>6</sup> Despite years of oversight<sup>7</sup> and billions of dollars in federal funding,<sup>8</sup> ICE detention continues to be plagued by these system-wide abuses. Just this past year, as the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the detention system and ICE failed to adequately respond, 21 immigrants tragically died in custody--the highest reported death toll in detention in 15 years.<sup>9</sup> This is added proof that ICE detention is an inherently flawed system incapable of reform.

The ten facilities outlined above as starting points are emblematic of these systemic issues, as detailed in the addended "First Ten to Communities Not Cages" report by Detention Watch Network.<sup>10</sup> Irwin in Georgia and Etowah in Alabama represent the many problems in rural facilities where people are detained far from community and legal support in horrific conditions. They exhibit some of the most severe cases of ICE's trademark abuse, including recent reports of gynecological procedures performed on women detained at Irwin without their consent.<sup>11</sup> In addition to displaying similar issues, Farmville<sup>12</sup> and Otero<sup>13</sup> have experienced some of the worst COVID-19 outbreaks in the system due to ICE's dangerous practices--demonstrating the agency's disregard for the lives of people in its custody.

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<sup>5</sup> Hawkins, Katherine; Peterson, Andrea; Schwellenbach, Nick; Steinle, Mia. "Isolated: ICE Confines Some Detainees with Mental Illness in Solitary for Months." Aug. 14, 2019. <https://www.pogo.org/investigation/2019/08/isolated-ice-confines-some-detainees-with-mental-illness-in-solitary-for-months/>.

<sup>6</sup> Chan, Jennifer; Small, Mary; Takei, Carl; Wu, Carol. "Fatal Neglect: How ICE ignores Death in Detention." American Civil Liberties Union, Detention Watch Network, National Immigrant Justice Center. Feb. 2016. <https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/sites/default/files/reports/Fatal%20Neglect%20ACLU-DWN-NIJC.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> See "*Detention Oversight*" on [detentionwatchnetwork.org](https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org). <https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/issues/detention-oversight>.

<sup>8</sup> See "*Understanding the Finances Behind ICE and CBP*" on [defundhatenow.org](https://defundhatenow.org). <https://defundhatenow.org/how-to/>.

<sup>9</sup> Shoichet, Catherine. "The death toll in ICE custody is the highest it's been in 15 years." CNN. Sept. 30, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/30/us/ice-deaths-detention-2020/index.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Ghandehari, Setareh; Suarez, Luis; Viera, Gabriel. "First Ten to Communities Not Cages." Detention Watch Network. Feb. 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Dickerson, Caitlin. "Inquiry Ordered Into Claims Immigrants Had Unwanted Gynecology Procedures." The New York Times. Sept. 16, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/16/us/ICE-hysterectomies-whistleblower-georgia.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Miroff, Nick; Olivo, Antonion. "ICE flew detainees to Virginia so the planes could transport agents to D.C. protests. A huge coronavirus outbreak followed." The Washington Post. Sept. 11, 2020. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/coronavirus/ice-air-farmville-protests-covid/2020/09/11/f70ebe1e-e861-11ea-bc79-834454439a44\\_story.html?arc404=true](https://www.washingtonpost.com/coronavirus/ice-air-farmville-protests-covid/2020/09/11/f70ebe1e-e861-11ea-bc79-834454439a44_story.html?arc404=true).

<sup>13</sup> Michels, Patrick; Morel, Laura. "'We sent 500 tests. They don't answer calls': Inside ICE's coronavirus testing disaster." New Mexico In Depth. Sept. 11, 2020. <https://nminddepth.com/2020/09/11/we-sent-500-tests-they-dont-answer-calls-inside-ices-coronavirus-testing-disaster>

Local communities in California and Texas have long pushed for the closure of the Adelanto,<sup>14</sup> Mesa Verde,<sup>15</sup> and Hutto<sup>16</sup> detention centers, which all have extensive histories of sexual, physical, and mental abuse and medical neglect. But ICE circumvented these community efforts by engaging in dubious contracting practices to lock in long-term contracts despite local opposition.

Finally, Berks, Karnes, and Dilley, compose the largest family detention program in the U.S. since the mass incarceration of Japanese Americans nearly a century ago and all report these same abuses. While we are pleased to hear about the recent release of families being held at the family detention centers, we remain extremely concerned about the future of these facilities.<sup>17</sup> While no one should spend a single minute in detention, the effects are particularly devastating for children and families in these centers. The administration should be moving to phase out detention, not rebrand the same facilities or use them to expand the system in other ways.

Reporting also suggests that Berks will be repurposed for the detention of adult migrant women.<sup>18</sup> This is not the first time this has happened. In 2009, the Obama administration changed Hutto from a family detention center to an adult detention center for women. The rampant abuse at Hutto continued, including forced labor practices where the people detained do facility upkeep for \$2 per hour as part of a cost-cutting strategy—an iteration of prison labor commonly practiced at ICE facilities.<sup>19</sup> We cannot continue to repeat the same mistakes by allowing these facilities to stay open.

This is only one of multiple efforts ICE is currently pursuing to expand detention. ICE published at least five Requests For Information for detention capacity in the months before President Biden took office.<sup>20</sup> For years, ICE has been permitted to pursue this kind of aggressive and unaccountable expansion. While

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<sup>14</sup> Plevin, Rebecca. “Adelanto approves GEO plan to expand capacity at California immigration detention center.” The Desert Sun. Feb. 20, 2020. <https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/2020/02/20/adelanto-oks-geo-groups-plan-expand-california-immigration-detention-center/4714571002/>.

<sup>15</sup> Plevin, Rebecca. “McFarland City Council approves GEO’s plan to expand immigration detention in Kern County.” The Desert Sun. Apr. 24, 2020. <https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/politics/immigration/2020/04/24/mcfarland-approves-geos-plan-expand-immigration-detention/3015465001/>.

<sup>16</sup> Detention Watch Network. “Two notorious Texas detention centers receive new 10-year ICE contracts with private prison corporations.” Aug. 10, 2020. <https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/pressroom/releases/2020/two-notorious-texas-detention-centers-receive-new-10-year-ice-contracts>.

<sup>17</sup> Detention Watch Network. “It’s detention if people are in ICE custody. No matter how the agency rebrands it.” Feb. 26, 2021. <https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/pressroom/releases/2021/it-s-detention-if-people-are-ice-custody-no-matter-how-agency-rebrands-it>.

<sup>18</sup> Foster-Frau, Silvia; Miroff, Nick; Sacchetti, Maria. “Texas family detention centers expected to transform into processing hubs.” The Washington Post. Mar. 4, 2021. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/texas-family-detention-centers-changed/2021/03/04/6a0bfa8a-7b6f-11eb-b3d1-9e5aa3d5220c\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/texas-family-detention-centers-changed/2021/03/04/6a0bfa8a-7b6f-11eb-b3d1-9e5aa3d5220c_story.html).

<sup>19</sup> Grassroots Leadership, Detention Watch Network. “Immigrant Detention Inspection Series: T. Don Hutto Residential Center.” Oct. 2016. [https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/sites/default/files/Hutto%20Inspection\\_DWN%20and%20Grassroots%20Leadership\\_2017.pdf](https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/sites/default/files/Hutto%20Inspection_DWN%20and%20Grassroots%20Leadership_2017.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Detention Watch Network. “ICE is attempting to lock in detention contracts ahead of the election.” Oct. 29, 2020. <https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/pressroom/releases/2020/ice-attempting-lock-detention-contracts-ahead-election>.

working to shut down these first ten facilities, the administration must also halt any expansion efforts to stay on the path towards fully phasing out detention.

As the Biden administration seeks to reverse the harms of the previous administration, it must remember that former President Trump's racist and xenophobic policies built on the racist and xenophobic system already in place. In order to truly prioritize building a humane immigration system, the administration needs to address the institutions that perpetuate its current cruelty, including ICE's detention system.

To that end, we urge the Biden administration to take the following actions within its first year in office:

- **Shut down the outlined ten facilities as a first step to fully phasing out the use of immigration detention. This means ending all contracts associated with these facilities so they can no longer be used for immigrant incarceration of any kind.**
- **Release all individuals still detained in the facilities prior to closure with notice to family and community organizations, rather than transferring them to other detention centers or placing them in surveillance programs.**
- **Halt all efforts to expand capacity for the detention of immigrants, including closing any open requests or solicitations and placing a moratorium on new contracts.**

People inside detention, advocacy groups, community members, and loved ones of people detained have been organizing to shut down detention centers across the country for years to build towards a future where every individual lives freely and is treated with dignity and respect. Now, with the average daily number of people in detention lower than it's been since the creation of ICE,<sup>21</sup> the opportunity to move forward with real transformative change and leave this failed system behind is more present than ever. We are counting on your administration to recognize this moral imperative and begin the work to permanently abolish immigration detention.

Sincerely,

Advocate Visitors with Immigrants in Detention (AVID) in the Chihuahuan Desert  
Advocating Opportunity  
Albuquerque SURJ  
Alchemy Massage & Movement Therapy  
Aldea - The People's Justice Center  
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas  
Alianza Sacramento  
America's Voice

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<sup>21</sup> See spreadsheet "FY2021 ICE Statistics" under Detention Statistics, Detention Management on [ice.gov](https://www.ice.gov/detain/detention-management).

American Friends Service Committee  
American Friends Service Committee Colorado  
American Immigration Council  
Art and Resistance Through Education (ARTE)  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Asian Law Caucus  
Asians 4 Black Lives  
Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action Champaign-Urbana  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action Greater Ann Arbor  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action New Mexico  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action Pittsburgh  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action South Jersey  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action Southeastern PA  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action Southern California  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action Bay Area Chapter  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action South Bay Chapter  
Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore I  
Benedictine Sisters of Chicago  
Bergen County Immigration Strategy Group  
Bethany House of Hospitality  
Black Alliance for Just Immigration  
Bridges Faith Initiative  
Brooklyn Defender Services  
Buen Vecino  
California Immigrant Policy Center  
California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance (CIYJA)  
Campaign for Immigrant Detention Reform (CIDR)  
Casa Ruby  
Center for Constitutional Rights  
Center for Empowering Refugees and Immigrants  
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies  
Center for Popular Democracy  
Center on Immigration at Cabrini University  
Central American Resource Center - CARECEN - of California  
Centro de Trabajadores Unidos (United Workers' Center)  
Centro Legal de la Raza  
Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America  
Church of Our Saviour / La Iglesia de Nuestro Salvador  
Church World Service  
Cleveland Jobs with Justice  
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)

Coalition on Human Needs  
Colorado Jobs with Justice  
Colorado People's Alliance  
Community Justice Exchange  
Comunidades Unidas en una Voz  
Connect Kankakee  
Connecticut Shoreline Indivisible  
Conversations with Friends  
Compassion, Peace, and Justice Team, Ridgefield-Crystal Lake Presbyterian Church  
Detention Watch Network  
Doctors for Camp Closure  
Dominican Sisters of Adrian  
Don't Separate Families  
El Refugio  
El Valle Women's Collaborative  
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities  
Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project  
Fair Chance Project  
Families United to End LWOP  
Fat Legal Advocacy, Rights and Education Project  
First Friends of New Jersey and New York  
Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project  
Forest Park Against Racism  
Free Migration Project  
Free Them All New Mexico  
Free Them All VA  
Freedom for Immigrants  
Freedom Network USA  
Frontera de Cristo  
Georgia Detention Watch  
Grassroots Leadership  
Guadalupe Presbyterian Church detention ministry  
Haitian Bridge Alliance  
Heather Wise Attorney at Law  
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA-JPIC  
ICE Fuera de Austin  
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
Immigrant Action Alliance  
Immigrant Defense Project  
Immigrant Justice Network  
Immigrant Justice Task Force of Wellington Avenue United Church of Christ  
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project

Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC)  
Immigration Center of San Bernardino, Inc  
Indivisible Santa Fe  
Indivisible: Narberth and Beyond  
Infinite Creative Literary  
Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice  
Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Collective  
Innovation Law Lab  
Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants  
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity  
Interreligious Task Force on Central America and Colombia  
ISLA: Immigration Services and Legal Advocacy  
Japanese American Citizens League  
Juntos Consulting  
Justice Action Center  
Konscious Kontractors  
La Resistencia  
Legal Aid Justice Center  
Long Beach Immigrant Rights Coalition  
Los Amigos del Parque  
Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants in Detention  
Mainers For Humane Immigration  
Memphis Immigrant Relief Fund  
Miami Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship  
Mijente  
Millions for Prisoners New Mexico  
National Employment Law Project  
National Immigrant Justice Center  
National Immigration Law Center  
National Immigration Project (NIPNLG)  
National Lawyers Guild-SF Bay Area  
National Network for Immigrant & Refugee Rights  
Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
New Sanctuary Coalition  
Nikkei Progressives  
NM Comunidades en Accion y de Fe (CAFe)  
No Detention Centers in Michigan  
NorCal Resist  
Northern New Mexico SURJ (Standing Up for Racial Justice)  
Northern Virginia Branch of Metro DC DSA  
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project

NYCD16 Indivisible  
Orange County Equality Coalition  
Orange County Rapid Response Network  
Oxfam America  
Pax Christi New Jersey  
Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition  
Poor Peoples Campaign  
POWER Live Free Immigration Group  
Power Through Peace  
Prison Divest NM Coalition  
Project South  
Public Counsel  
Queer Detainee Empowerment Project  
Queridomundo Creative  
Quixote Center  
Re:Store Justice  
Rural Organizing Project  
San Joaquin College of Law – New American Legal Clinic  
Sanctuary DMV  
Santa Fe Dreamers Project  
Santa Fe Faith Network for Immigrant Justice  
Services, Immigrant Rights & Education Network (SIREN)  
Servicios Juridicos Internacionales  
Shut Down Berks Coalition  
Shut Down Etowah  
Siembra NC  
Silicon Valley De-Bug  
Sisters of Charity, BVM  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team  
Snohomish Immigration Advocacy  
Somos South Georgia  
South Georgia Immigrant Support Network  
Southeast Immigrant Rights Network  
Southern Border Communities Coalition  
SPLC Action Fund  
St. Louis Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America  
Sueños Sin Fronteras de Tejas (SSFTX)  
Teachers Against Child Detention: Albuquerque  
The Advocates for Human Rights  
The Birmingham Free Store  
The Center for Victims of Torture  
The Mami Chelo Foundation



Tikkun Olam Chavurah  
Tsuru for Solidarity  
Tzedek Chicago  
Underscore Theatre Company  
UndocuBlack Network  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee  
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice  
United Methodist Church  
United We Dream  
UnLocal  
Waco Immigrants Alliance  
Wellington Avenue United Church of Christ  
Western MA Asylum Support Network  
Western MA Jewish Activists for Immigrant Justice  
Wheaton Franciscans Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Office  
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center  
Witness at the Border  
Women's Refugee Commission  
You Are Not Alone (YANA)