

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,¹ and includes rampant medical neglect,² mental, physical and sexual abuse,³ scarcity of food and other basic necessities,⁴ retaliatory and violent

¹ 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>.

² 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>.

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

⁴ 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,⁵ and even death.⁶ Despite years of oversight⁷ and billions of dollars in federal funding,⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ In addition to displaying similar issues, Farmville¹² and Otero¹³ 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.

⁵ 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/>.

⁶ 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>.

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

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

⁹ 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>.

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

¹¹ 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>.

¹² 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/f70e1e1e-e861-11ea-bc79-834454439a44_story.html?arc404=true.

¹³ 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,¹⁴ Mesa Verde,¹⁵ and Hutto¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ For years, ICE has been permitted to pursue this kind of aggressive and unaccountable expansion. While

¹⁴ 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/>.

¹⁵ 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/>.

¹⁶ 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>.

¹⁷ 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>.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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,²¹ 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

²¹ 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)