

July 7, 2014

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Deputy Secretary
Department of Homeland Security

Re: Open Letter in Response to Announcement of New Immigrant Family Detention Beds

Dear Secretary Johnson and Deputy Secretary Mayorkas:

We, the undersigned civil rights and civil liberties, human rights, faith, immigration, labor, criminal justice, legal, and children's rights organizations, write to strongly urge you to end plans to open new immigrant family detention centers.

We are gravely concerned by the Obama Administration's announcement that it will expand the use of family detention. Family detention profoundly impacts the emotional and physical well-being of children and breaks down family relationships. While the administration is understandably under pressure to respond to the current humanitarian crisis at the border, locking babies in prison cells and deporting women and young children to dangerous situations are not the solution.

In 2009, the Administration took positive steps in rolling back family detention by ending the use of family detention at T. Don Hutto, a Texas facility operated by the for-profit private prison company Corrections Corporation of America. At that time, the Administration also withdrew plans for three new family detention centers.

The Hutto detention center, where Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detained families from 2006 to 2009, became a national embarrassment. Although DHS claimed the facility was specially equipped to meet the needs of families, reports emerged that children as young as eight months old wore prison uniforms, lived in locked prison cells with open-air toilets, subjected to highly restricted movement, and threatened with alarming disciplinary tactics, including threats of separation from their parents if they cried too much or played too loudly. Medical treatment was inadequate and children as young as one lost weight. The Hutto detention center was the subject of a lawsuit, a human rights investigation, multiple national and international media reports, and a national campaign to end family detention.

Because children require specialized educational, medical, and legal support, family detention in closed facilities is inhumane, inappropriate, and imposes a significant financial cost on the

federal government.

We call on the Administration to utilize alternatives to detention for families. Community support programs, case management and other programs already in use by ICE are effective in ensuring appearance and compliance with immigration orders and should be utilized as widely as possible. The development of an extensive alternatives program for families could also be adopted from existing resettlement models. Alternatives such as these are more consistent with American principles, and much more cost effective than traditional detention or warehousing. These alternatives should include the use of case managers or social workers to manage families' cases rather than placing them in detention. For families without housing, the administration should partner with non-profit shelter or child welfare organizations experienced in supporting asylum-seeking and immigrant families to resolve any issues preventing the direct release of families. Social workers with proven track records providing family and child welfare services offer the only appropriate expertise for supporting families in civil immigration proceedings.

For questions or to follow-up on this letter, please contact Bob Libal at Grassroots Leadership at blibal@grassrootsleadership.org or (512) 971-0487 or Michelle Brané at the Women's Refugee Committee at MichelleB@wrcommission.org or (646) 717-7191.

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Grassroots Leadership

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On behalf of:

Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice
Alliance San Diego
American Civil Liberties Union
American Friends Service Committee
American Gateways
American Immigration Lawyers Association
Americans for Immigrant Justice
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-LA
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance
Assisting Latinos
Austin Immigrant Rights Coalition
Border Network for Human Rights
California CURE
Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families

CASA de Maryland
Center for Constitutional Rights
Center for Popular Democracy
Coalicion de Derechos Humanos
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles
Coloradans For Immigrant Rights, a project of the AFSC
Comite de Derechos Humanos de Forks
Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto
Community to Community Development - C2C
Detention Watch Network
DREAM Activist Virginia
DreamActivist.org
East Bay Immigrant Youth Coalition
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project
Families for Freedom
First Focus
First Friends
Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project
Florida Immigrant Coalition
Franciscan Action Network
Freedom House
Freedom University
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Friends of Broward Detainees
Georgia Dreamers Alliance
Grassroots Leadership
Greater Birmingham Ministries
HIAS
Human Rights Defense Center
Human Rights First
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Immigrant Defense Project
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Immigration Taskforce of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod - ELCA
In The Public Interest
International Detention Coalition
Justice Policy Institute
Justice Strategies

La Raza Centro Legal
La Union del Pueblo Entero
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Legal Services for Prisoners with Children
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Mission Waco
N.C. Immigrant Rights Project
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association
National Council of Jewish Women
National Day Laborer Organizing Network
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
National Guestworker Alliance
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Forum
National Immigration Law Center
National Immigration Project
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice
Nuestra Casa
OneAmerica
Pax Christ USA
Pax Christi Seed Planters
Pax Christi Southwest Florida
Pax Christi-Phoenix
People Acting in Community Together
Peoples' Action for Rights and Community
PICO National Network
Presente
Prison Activist Resource Center
Private Corrections Working Group
Proyecto Juan Diego
Pueblo Sin Fronteras
Queer Detainee Empowerment Project
Resist the Raids
Responsible Endowments Coalition
San Diego Mission

Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network
Seton Hall University School of Law Center for Social Justice
Shirlington Employment and Education Center
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
Southern Poverty Law Center
St. Matthew Immigration Detention Ministry
Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition
Texans United for Families
Texas Civil Rights Project
Texas MoveOn, Austin, San Antonio, Dallas & Fort Worth
The Advocates for Human Rights
Transgender Law Center
United Families
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
United Methodist Women
United We Dream
Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations
Women's Refugee Commission