

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 30, 2020

Acting Secretary Chad Wolf
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 12th St. SW
Washington, D.C. 20536

Acting Director Matthew T. Albence
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th St. SW
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf and Acting Director Albence:

We write to you to urge you to safely and swiftly release all parents and children that are detained at the Karnes County Residential Center (“Karnes”), the South Texas Family Residential Center (“Dilley”), and the Berks County Residential Center (“Berks”)—the three Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) facilities that detain family units with their children—by July 17, 2020.

On Friday, June 26, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, Judge Dolly Gee of the United States District Court of the Central District of California ordered ICE to release all children who have been detained for more than twenty days at Karnes, Dilley, and Berks by July 17, 2020. *Flores v. Barr*, 2:85-cv-4544-DMG-AGR (C.D. Cal. June 26, 2020). Medical experts have continuously warned that detention increases the risk of transmission of the virus among detained individuals and facility staff. As Judge Gee observed, these facilities are now “on fire” due to ICE’s failure to ensure “the basics,” such as adequate social distancing, masking, and testing, and because of COVID-19 outbreaks in each facility’s surrounding area. *Flores*, at 3. ICE has confirmed that at least 11 children and adults and one GEO employee who works at Karnes, and at least two ICE officials and three CoreCivic employees who work at Dilley, have tested positive for COVID-19.

Just last week, three Members of Congress visited the ICE family detention center in Dilley and spoke with at least six families who are currently detained. After the visit, the Members of Congress raised concerns about the unsafe conditions they witnessed, and the need to immediately release families amid the pandemic. Despite the heightened precautions taken at the Dilley facility during the visit, the Members of Congress who toured the facility were exposed to an ICE officer who tested positive for COVID-19 mere days after the Congressional visit.

Since the COVID-19 crisis started, Members of Congress, advocates, attorneys, and doctors have continuously urged ICE to use its authority to release detained families. Instead of releasing families, ICE has used the pandemic to implement cruel and inhumane policies toward immigrants. For example, in May, following another order from Judge Gee that required ICE conduct individualized release assessments for children in detention, the agency asked detained parents to sign documents without counsel present, leading those parents to believe they were forced to choose between indefinite detention with their children, and the release of their children alone, without them.

We know the Administration has a history of separating thousands of children from their parents. Family separation should *never* be this country’s policy. Medical organizations have long stated that the practice creates extraordinary harm to children. Detention of children for any amount of time, even with their parents, causes

physical harm and irreparable trauma. We call upon ICE to act with compassion and release families *together*. These families have relatives and sponsors who are immediately available to provide them with care so that they may shelter-in-place.

The Administration must stop using this public health crisis as a means for implementing unlawful and inhumane immigration policies. In these extraordinary times, human suffering need not be compounded through traumatizing and instilling fear in the hearts of migrant parents. ICE has long had the authority and discretion to swiftly and safely release families together into the U.S. and should act to do so immediately. Once these families are free from detention, together, we urge ICE to commit to a permanent policy of family unity and to seek alternatives to family detention— including release on recognizance or community-driven support - in every case.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Bill Foster
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Al Green
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

Filemon Vela
Member of Congress

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

Cedric L. Richmond
Member of Congress

Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress

Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

Grace Meng
Member of Congress

Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

David E. Price
Member of Congress

Greg Stanton
Member of Congress

Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

Deb Haaland
Member of Congress

Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
Member of Congress

J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

James R. Langevin
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Jesús G. “Chuy” García
Member of Congress

Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

Joe Neguse
Member of Congress

José E. Serrano
Member of Congress

Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

Judy Chu
Member of Congress

Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

Katherine M. Clark
Member of Congress

Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress

Marc Veasey
Member of Congress

Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Mark Takano
Member of Congress

Mike Quigley
Member of Congress

Mike Thompson
Member of Congress

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Pete Aguilar
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal
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Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

Raul Grijalva
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Rosa L. DeLauro
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Ruben Gallego
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Steven Horsford
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Susan A. Davis
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Sylvia R. Garcia
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Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr.
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Jason Crow
Member of Congress

Donald M. Payne, Jr
Member of Congress

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

Dina Titus
Member of Congress

Lori Trahan
Member of Congress