VIA Email Delivery Only

March 6, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

Mr. Tae D. Johnson
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

Re: End Immigration Detention Contracts Expiring in 2023

Dear President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas, and Acting Director Johnson:

We, the undersigned groups, call on you to end all Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention contracts expiring in 2023. These include, but are not limited to:

- Alamance County Jail (North Carolina), was set to expire on 1/31/2023
- Webb County Detention Center (Texas), was set to expire on 2/28/2023
- Sherburne County Jail (Minnesota), set to expire on 5/2/2023
- Caroline Detention Facility (Virginia), set to expire on 6/30/2023
- Laredo Processing Center (Texas), set to expire on 6/30/2023
- Monroe County Detention - Dorm (Michigan), set to expire on 6/30/2023
- Okmulgee County Jail (Oklahoma), set to expire on 7/16/2023
- El Valle Detention Facility (Texas), set to expire on 7/17/2023
- Elizabeth Contract Detention Facility (New Jersey), set to expire on 8/31/2023
- Joe Corley Processing Center (Texas), set to expire on 8/31/2023
- ICA Farmville Detention Center (Virginia), set to expire on 9/15/2023
- Plymouth County Correctional Facility (Massachusetts), set to expire on 9/21/2023

On the campaign trail, President Biden promised to prioritize the dignity of immigrants and those seeking safety in the United States. As he took office in January 2021, the number of people in ICE detention had decreased to approximately 15,000 (due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the previous administration's anti-asylum policies). These historically low numbers provided the Biden administration with an opportunity to chart a new path. Instead, the number of people detained began increasing again after the first month of President Biden's term. In addition, on the campaign trail President Biden committed to ending the use of private immigration detention centers, but his January 2021 Executive Order phasing out federal private prisons excluded facilities used by DHS to detain immigrants and at least one of the facilities closed under the executive order has been converted to an ICE facility.
While we welcome the steps the administration has taken by ending the use of Bristol County Correctional Facility, Irwin County Detention Center, Etowah County Detention Center, Berks County Residential Center, and Yuba County Jail, ICE detention has continued to expand, detention numbers have nearly doubled, and conditions remain dire. As of February 21, 2023, there were 27,257 people in detention.

For decades, government oversight agencies, media outlets, and local advocates have documented inhumane conditions, mistreatment, abuse, inadequate medical care, and death at immigration detention facilities nationwide. The ICE facilities with contracts expiring this year are no exception.

For example, El Valle Detention Center in Raymondville, Texas is an infamous ICE detention facility of many names and histories of abuse. It was previously the Willacy County Processing Center and, when it opened in 2006, the largest ICE detention center in the country. Immigration advocates dubbed it “Tent City” or “Ritmo” due to the abusive conditions. In 2011, the facility was converted into a Bureau of Prisons facility and renamed the Willacy County Correctional Center. ICE was forced to close the facility in 2015 after continued reports of abuse and protests by people incarcerated there highlighted poor medical care, sexual abuse, and unsafe living conditions. In 2019, ICE reopened the facility under its current name, El Valle, but the problems continued. In July 2020, 40 women detained at El Valle went on a hunger strike, protesting the lack of cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment that could prevent exposure to COVID-19. El Valle’s current contract is set to expire on July 17, 2023.

In New Jersey, advocates have long supported the call for closure of the Elizabeth Contract Detention Facility. In August 2021, ICE quietly extended the Elizabeth contract to circumvent a New Jersey state law that would close the facility. Multiple reports have documented unsafe living conditions and retaliation at the facility, including a 2018 report from a team of researchers and legal and health professionals from Human Rights First that highlighted the substandard medical care, poor food quality, and insufficient ventilation that led to many immigrants’ health problems. The Elizabeth contract is set to expire on August 31, 2023.

In addition, the ICA-Farmville Detention Center in Virginia, operated by the private prison corporation Immigration Centers of America, has a years-long history of documented abuse and inhumane conditions, including the use of force by guards, retaliation for complaints, worms in the food provided to immigrants, and negligent medical care, including a failure to respond adequately to the COVID-19 pandemic. In July 2020, over 93% of people detained at Farmville tested positive for COVID-19, and one person died. As a result of litigation brought by people detained at Farmville during the pandemic, ICE is operating the facility at a fraction of its capacity, with only 17 people detained there as of January 23, 2023. The contract is set to expire on September 15, 2023.

These are only a few examples of the abuses and harms of ICE detention across the United States. Empowered by the current and previous administrations to ignore and cover up these deadly conditions, ICE and the local entities and private prison corporations it contracts with continue to operate without repercussions, guaranteeing the facilities remain plagued by
systemic abuse. It has long been clear that immigration detention is a fundamentally flawed, inhumane, and unnecessary system that needs to end.

As the Biden administration is now halfway through its term, communities are looking to President Biden to deliver on his promises to bring fairness to the immigration system and reduce reliance on detention. The upcoming contract expirations provide another opportunity to do so. We urge you to decline to renew all detention contracts set to expire this year as a step towards fulfilling these promises. We also ask that you end the contracts for Alamance County Jail in North Carolina and Webb County Detention Center in Texas, both of which were set to expire earlier this year but were renewed.

We appreciate your attention to this urgent matter. As organizations representing and supporting people in ICE detention, including in the facilities listed above, we also request a meeting to further discuss the importance of ending these contracts.

We look forward to your response. If you have any questions, please contact Setareh Ghandehari, sghandehari@detentionwatchnetwork.org.

Sincerely,

Detention Watch Network
#DetentionKills
18 Million Rising
A4Abolitionist
Alianza Americas
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
American Friends Service Committee, Colorado
American Immigration Lawyers Association
APIC SPS
Arab Resource & Organizing Center (AROC)
Association of Mexicans in North Carolina, Inc. (AMEXCAN)
Bend the Arc Jewish Action: South Jersey
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action Pittsburgh
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action Southern California
Bergen County Green Party
Bergen County Immigration Strategy Group
Bilbao Law LLC
Border Line Crisis Center
Boston Immigration Justice Accompaniment Network
Buen Vecino
CA Collaborative for Immigrant Justice
California Coalition for Women Prisoners
Casa Freehold
Center for Empowering Refugees and Immigrants
Center for Law and Social Policy
Central Jersey Coalition Against Endless War
Church World Service
Ciudadanos organizados
Cleveland Jobs with Justice
Coalición de Derechos Humanos
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice
Communities United for Status & Protection (CUSP)
Community Asylum Seekers Project
Comunidad Maya Pixan Ixim
Conversations with Friends (of Minnesota)
DIRE
DIRE Legal Services
Doctors For Camp Closure
Dorothy Day Catholic Worker, Washington DC
Dream Action Oklahoma
El Centro Hispano, Inc.
El Refugio
El Vínculo Hispano/The Hispanic Liaison
Envision Freedom Fund
Espacio Migrante
Essex County Community Organization
Faith in Action (LA RED)
Faith in New Jersey
Families For Freedom
FANG Collective
First Friends of NJ & NY
Free Migration Project
Freedom for Immigrants (FFI)
Freedom Network USA
Freedom to Thrive
Georgia Detention Watch
Grassroots Leadership
Guadalupe Presbyterian Church, USA
Haitian Bridge Alliance
Hartford Deportation Defense
Home is Here NOLA
HOPE CC
Human Impact Partners (HIP)
Human Rights First
ICNA Council for Social Justice
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Illustrac Impact LLC
Immigrant Action Alliance
Immigrant Defenders Law Center
Immigrant Defense LLC
Immigrant Families Together
Immigrant Justice Network
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Immigrant Welcoming Working Group, Plymouth Congregational Church, Minneapolis
Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice
Interfaith Campaign for Just Closures
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity
Interfaith Welcome Coalition - San Antonio
Jewish Activists for Immigration Justice of Western Massachusetts
Jordy's Auto Service
JPIC
Juntos
Justice Strategies
La Unidad11
Latin America Working Group (LAWG)
League of Conservation Voters
Long Beach Immigrant Rights Coalition
Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants in Detention
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Make the Road NY
Marianist Social Justice
Mariposa Legal, program of COMMON Foundation
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Migrant Center for Human Rights
MN8
MPower Change
Muslim Advocates
Muslim Counterpublics Lab
N.Y.U. Review of Law and Social Change
National Employment Law Project
National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC)
National Immigration Law Center
National Immigration Project (NIPNLG)
National Lawyers Guild San Francisco Bay Area Chapter
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Never Again Action Boston
Never Again Action DC
New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice
New Jersey Forum for Human Rights
No Detention Centers in Michigan
NorCal Resist
North American Climate, Conservation and Environment (NACCE)
North Carolina Justice Center
North New Jersey Democratic Socialists of America
Northern New Jersey Sanctuary Coalition
NYU Immigrant Rights Clinic
Occupy Bergen County
Office of Peace, Justice, and Ecological Integrity, Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth
Orange County Equality Coalition
Organize! Ohio
Parishioners for Peace & Justice of St. Peter Claver Church, Montclair, NJ
Parole Preparation Project
Pax Christi Illinois
Pax Christi New Jersey
Pax Christi New York State
Pax Christi Northwest
Pax Christi USA
Peace and Freedom Party
Poder Latinx
Poligon Education Fund
Prisoners' Legal Services of MA
Public Counsel
Puerto Rican Nation
Pulmonary and Sleep Associates Of Marin
Rising Voices
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network
San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium
Sanctuary and Resistance to Injustice
SARI
Showing Up for Racial Justice
Society of the flora, fauna & friend
SOLACE
Somos South Georgia
South Bay People Power
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Southern California Immigration Project
St. Louis Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America
Strengthening Sanctuary Alliance
Struggle for Miami's Affordable and Sustainable Housing (SMASH)
SURJ NYC
The Bronx Defenders
The Mami Chelo Foundation
Transformations CDC
Tsuru for Solidarity
UndocuBlack Network
Unitarian Universalist FaithAction NJ
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
United We Dream
UU Mass Action
UUFHCT
Vecindarios901
Vermont Interfaith Action
Wilco Justice Alliance (Williamson County, TX)
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center
Women's Refugee Commission