



Acting Director Tae D. Johnson
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th St. SW
Washington, D.C. 20536

March 3, 2022

Re: ICE must release all people as COVID-19 cases in detention rise

Dear Acting Director Johnson,

We the 200 undersigned organizations demand that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) use its discretion to immediately release all people in ICE custody amid the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. In recent weeks, as the Omicron variant caused the largest wave to date, the number of people diagnosed in detention has gone up by a shocking 940% since January 3rd.¹ Continuing to deprive people of their freedom during an ongoing pandemic contributes to the already lethal conditions of mass confinement.²

ICE has repeatedly proven to be incapable and unwilling to adequately care for people in its custody under normal circumstances. People in detention, advocates, media, and the government's own inspectors have documented the long history of abuse and neglect in ICE detention centers, including lack of basic necessities like shampoo and toilet paper, moldy food, medical neglect and abuse, physical, verbal, and sexual abuse and even death.³ Fiscal Year 2020 marked the highest death toll in ICE custody in 15 years⁴ and under the Biden administration there have tragically already been five deaths in ICE custody. These horrible conditions have only been exacerbated during the pandemic. In 2020 public health experts were clear that the best way to protect people was to free them from detention.⁵ People in congregate settings like detention centers are at grave risk of contracting

¹ Adry Torres, DailyMail.com, "Five Immigrants Facing Deportation File Lawsuit Against ICE Over Failure to Provide COVID-19 Booster Shots As Infections at the Federal Immigration Agency's Detention Centers Have Spiked by 940% since January, February 4, 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10477879/Five-immigrants-facing-deportation-accuse-ICE-denying-COVID-19-booster-shots.html>.

² Amanda Holpuch, The Guardian, "Coronavirus Inevitable in prison-like US immigration centers doctors say", 11 Mar. 2020, www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/11/coronavirus-outbreak-us-immigration-centers.

³ Gregory Hooks, Bob Libal, Detention Watch Network, Hotbeds of Infection: How ICE Detention Contributed to the Spread of COVID-19 in the United States, December 2020, https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/sites/default/files/reports/DWN_Hotbeds%20of%20Infection_2020_FOR%20WFB.pdf.

⁴ Catherine E. Shoichet, CNN, "The Death Toll in ICE Custody is the Highest it's Been in 15 Years," September 20, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/30/us/ice-deaths-detention-2020/index.html>.

⁵ Human Rights First, "Physicians for Human Rights and Human Rights First, Public Health Experts, Medical Doctors, Prison Experts, and Former ICE Officials Urge Releases from Immigration Detention Facilities to Control the Spread of COVID-19."

infectious illnesses, such as COVID-19.⁶ Not only did ICE fail to follow the recommendations to release a significant number of people, they also evaded court orders requiring releases⁷, and in fact, the number of people in detention since President Biden took office has skyrocketed.⁸ Additionally, vaccine distribution, particularly booster shots, has been severely lacking and people in detention continue to report that they are not given adequate supplies of PPE and that detention center staff often do not wear masks and often deny testing when people are ill.⁹ In recent weeks, facilities across the country have reported record case numbers as outbreaks have occurred across the ICE's network of approximately 200 facilities.¹⁰

ICE detention is cruel, inhumane and unnecessary under any circumstance, but especially so during a deadly pandemic. In March 2020, nearly 800 organizations called on you to free everyone in ICE custody.¹¹ Nearly two years later, we again call on you to:

- **Release all people in ICE detention and surveillance programs**
- **Cease all enforcement operations**
- **Cancel detention contracts and immediately halt all expansion efforts to phase out the use of immigration detention permanently**

Sincerely,

Detention Watch Network
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights
Casa Ruby
Envision Freedom Fund
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
UndocuBlack Network
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

April 17, 2020, <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/public-health-experts-medical-doctors-prison-experts-and-former-ice-officials-urge-releases>.

⁶ Hotbeds of Infection, *Ibid*.

⁷ Nicholas Iovino, "ICE Settles Lawsuit Over Covid Risk at California Detention Centers," Courthouse News Service, January 27, 2022, <https://www.courthousenews.com/ice-settles-lawsuit-over-covid-risk-at-california-detention-centers/>.

⁸ Detention Watch Network, "Advocates Sound the Alarm: The Number of People in ICE Detention Spikes Under the Biden Administration to over 20k," May 18, 2021, <https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/pressroom/releases/2021/advocates-sound-alarm-number-people-ice-detention-spikes-under-biden>.

⁹ Camilo Montoya-Galvez, CBSNews.com, "Government Medical Advisors Urge ICE to Expand COVID-19 Vaccinations for Immigrant Detainees," January 26, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/immigration-ice-detainees-covid-19-vaccines/>.

¹⁰ Theresa Cheng, "Covid is Racing Through Immigration Detention Centers – and it's Putting the Entire Country at Risk," San Francisco Chronicle, February 8, 2022, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/COVID-is-racing-through-immigration-detention-16839783.php>.

¹¹ Detention Watch Network, "An Unprecedented Response: Nearly 800 Non-governmental Organizations Call on ICE to Release All People from Immigration Detention," March 19, 2020, <https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/pressroom/releases/2020/unprecedented-response-nearly-800-non-governmental-organizations-call-ice>.

Rian Immigrant Center
Mariposa Legal, program of COMMON Foundation
Services, Immigrant Rights and Education Network (SIREN)
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
Rainbow Beginnings
Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America
Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America
La Resistencia
Interfaith Welcome Coalition - San Antonio
Doctors for Camp Closure
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Healthworks Ending Detention
Center for Popular Democracy
Advocate Visitors with Immigrants in Detention (AVID) in the Chihuahuan Desert
Legal Aid Justice Center
Immigrant Families Together
Free Migration Project
NorCal Resist
Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights
MPower Change
Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti
Mijente
Cleveland Jobs with Justice
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA-JPIC
Justice Strategies
InterReligious Task Force on Central America
RCHP-AHC Still Waters Anti-trafficking Program
Cultivando
Never Again Action
Arizona Dream Act Coalition
Denver Communists
Queer Detainee Empowerment Project
Prairielands Freedom Fund
Cervtiude Coalition 501 c3
Food Empowerment Project
American Friends Service Committee, Colorado
New York Immigration Coalition
Pax Christi New Jersey
Trans Pride Initiative
Disciples Peace Fellowship
Planners Network
Transgender, Gender-Variant, and Intersex Justice Project
Drug Policy Alliance
Kern Welcoming and Extending Solidarity to Immigrants
Norris Law Group PLLC

Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR-USA)
Jewish Voice for Peace New Orleans
Immigrant Welcoming Group, Plymouth Congregational Church, Minneapolis
Minnesota Interfaith Coalition on Immigration
Campaign to Abolish Torture in Vietnam
Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative
Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee
IWOC Rochester
Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition
Forai
Copper Country Guatemala Accompaniment Project
Comunidades Unidas en una Voz
Women on the Rise
Central Americans for Empowerment
Immigrant Action Alliance
Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy
BuxMont DSA
Make the Road New York
Culture Change Project
Office of NYC Council Member Tiffany Cabán
Rural Organizing Project
Garífuna Community Services INC
Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)
El/La Para TransLatinas
Sanctuary DMV
Minnesota Freedom Fund
Families for Freedom
Mackins & Mackins LLP
Public Counsel
Espacio Migrante
Long Beach Immigrant Rights Coalition
Orange County Equality Coalition
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network
Architects, Designers, and Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR)
Community Peacemaker Teams
Freedom for Immigrants (FFI)
Nicaragua Center for Community Action
Community Justice Exchange / National Bail Fund Network
National Immigrant Justice Center
Brazilian Women's Group
Project Home
BanchaLenguas Language Justice Collective
Occupy Bergen County (New Jersey)
Southwest Suburban Immigrant Project
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada

Bergen County Immigration Strategy Group
Survived and Punished NY
Sisters and Brothers of Immigrants
Autistic People of Color Fund
American Friends Service Committee
Jobs and Equal Rights for ALL
Latino Arte and Culture
Centro De Trabajadores Unidos: United Workers Center
Fishadelphia
Mi Casa Resiste
Institute for Animal Happiness
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Transformations CDC
The Athens Immigrant Rights Coalition
Bergen County Green Party
Next Up Action Fund
Alianza Sacramento
The Center for Carceral Communities
Jewish Activists for Immigration Justice of Western Mass
Movement for Justice in El Barrio
Denver Justice and Peace Committee (DJPC)
Grassroots Leadership
Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa
Black LGBTQ Migrant Project (BLMP)
Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)
Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network
Marianist Social Justice Committee
Showing Up for Racial Justice
Borderless Existence Initiative
San Diego Tenants Union
Presente.org
Alianza Americas
UU Faith Action
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team
Central Unitarian Church of Paramus Social Action Team
U-Lead Athens, Georgia
Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) NYC
Colorado Immigrant organization
International Detention Coalition (IDC)
Lamar Unidos
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity
National Lawyers Guild - Buffalo

Westchester Jewish Coalition for Immigration
Accompaniment & Sanctuary Coalition Colorado Springs
El Refugio
The Bronx Defenders
Mi casa es su casa
Adelanto Visitation & Advocacy Network
NYLPI Medical Providers Network
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
Tucson Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ)
UCLA Student Wellness Commission
Redes en Acción Venezuela
GEORGIA LATINO ALLIANCE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
Border Network for Human Rights
RAICES
California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance
Unitarian Universalist FaithAction NJ
Witness at the Border
Church World Service
Forks Human Rights Group/ Comité de Derechos Humanos de Forks
ATL Radical Art
Gente de Venezuela Philadelphia
Rhythm Science Sound
United We Dream Network
Deported Asylum Seekers Assistance Project
Respond Crisis Translation
The ICE Breakers
Fireweed Collective
Midwest Immigration Bond Fund
Communities Not Cages Indiana Coalition
350 New Orleans
Innovation Law Lab
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
National Immigration Law Center
Richmond Community Bail Fund
NYCD16 Indivisible
Centro Legal de la Raza
Bridges Faith Initiative
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice
Contra Costa Immigrant Rights Alliance
Tucson Second Chance Community Bail Fund
TAA, the Graduate Labor Union at University of Wisconsin-Madison
El Vínculo Hispano/The Hispanic Liaison
Community Justice Alliance
First Friends of NJ & NY

Refugee Support Network
Human Impact Partners (HIP)
Immigrant Justice Network
California Coalition for Women Prisoners
Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project
Peace Action New York State
JUNTOS
Civil Rights Education and Enforcement Center (CREEC)
Intransitive
Servants of Mary, US/Jamaica Comm Council
Boston Immigration Justice Accompaniment Network
Richmond Tenants' Union
Connecticut Coalition for Immigrant Freedom
Notre Dame Sisters Omaha NE