



July 13, 2021

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas
Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20016

Director Brian McShane
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Philadelphia Field Office
114 N. 8th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Re: Releasing People Detained at York County Prison by Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Dear DHS Secretary Mayorkas and ICE Field Office Director McShane:

We are elected Senators and State Representatives serving the people and communities of Pennsylvania. Together, we comprise the Welcoming PA Caucus, which was formed to develop Commonwealth-specific legislative and policy solutions to the hardships that affect new Pennsylvanians. We have recently learned that the contract between York County and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will not be renewed. We have also been made aware that those currently held at York County Prison are being removed from the facility and transferred elsewhere. For years, advocates and the friends and families of people detained at York have called for an end to its use as an ICE detention center. Now that this end is in sight, we want to ensure that all who are currently detained are released to the care of their families and communities, and not transferred from their support systems, their pastoral care, their legal representation, and the lives they hope to build in Pennsylvania. **We ask that you continue your efforts to undo harm done to people and communities and immediately release anyone detained by ICE at York County Prison.**

Transfers are burdensome and dangerous. From our constituents who have been in detention, we know that imprisonment alienates a person from their immediate community; detained people struggle to communicate with loved ones and to receive the legal help they need. Transferring a person when they are already incarcerated throws up additional obstacles to accessing familial and legal support. Further, the

coronavirus is still very much present in our communities. Over the last year, transfers between detention centers have hastened the spread of COVID-19 and created hotspots for the virus.

These transfers are also unnecessary. Studies have shown that most people who are released return to court when asked. This is especially true for York detainees, who are overwhelmingly asylum-seekers, people who come to the United States to escape violence, persecution, and instability in their countries of origin. They have a vested interest in staying in the U.S. and have claimed a legal category prescribed precisely for their situation.

Moreover, most people currently detained by ICE at York do not rank as people prioritized for removal under the Biden administration. To prolong their detention through transfers hastens deportations that undermine current federal policy as well as a person's safety. Deporting asylum-seekers simply returns a person to volatile situations they have tried to escape.

As elected officials, we have made a sworn commitment to represent our constituents, and this includes those across the citizenship spectrum. Release will alleviate burdens for communities that have already suffered. Release will also allow us to turn our attentions to more pressing problems like longstanding social ills that can improve—not harm—our communities. Release, finally, is a policy that actualizes our vision of what Pennsylvania and the United States can be. By making families and communities whole, it is an act of redress. By centering the needs of our most vulnerable immigrant neighbors, it encourages compassion.

The trend of terminating ICE contracts is national. We know that neighboring states are seeing the same closures and face the same important question of how to proceed with those who are still incarcerated. At this critical juncture, your departments face a consequential decision: will you perpetuate the harms that those who seek to become citizens of our country experience, or will you take a stand on the right side of history and facilitate the trend toward community-based alternatives, proven to keep communities and families intact? **We urge you to continue this trend of undoing harm, and we demand the release of those detained at York right now.**

Sincerely,



Rep. Hohenstein
Welcoming Pa Caucus Co-chair
House District 177



Rep. Innamorato
Welcoming Pa Co-chair
House District 21



Rep. Burgos
Welcoming Pa Caucus Co-chair
House District 197



Sen. Saval
Senate District 1



Rep. Schweyer
House District 22



Sen. Kearney
Senate District 26



Rep. Schlossberg
Caucus Administrator
House District 132



Rep. Kinkead
House District 20



Rep. Hill-Evans
House District 95



Rep. D. Miller
Caucus Chair
House District 42



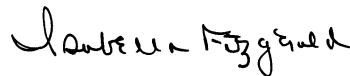
Rep. Frankel
House District 23



Rep. Sanchez
House District 153



Rep. Howard
House District 167



Rep. Fitzgerald
House District 203