



April 8, 2020

Sheriff Richard K. Jones
Butler County Sheriff's Office

Donald L. Dixon
T.C. Rogers
Cindy Carpenter
Butler County Commissioners

Sheriff Scott A. Hildenbrand
Geauga County Sheriff's Office

James W. Dvorak
Timothy C. Lennon
Ralph Spidalieri
Geauga County Commissioners

Sheriff John L. Hinton
Morrow County Sheriff's Office

Burgess Castle
Warren Davis
Thomas E. Whiston
Morrow County Commissioners

Sheriff William E. Eckelberry
Seneca County Sheriff's Office

Mike Kerschner
Tony Paradiso
Shayne Thomas
Seneca County Commissioners

SENT VIA EMAIL

RE: COVID-19 and immigration enforcement



Dear Sheriffs Eckelberry, Hinton, Hildenbrand, Jones, and County Commissioners:

We are grateful for the steps that many local and state leaders across Ohio have already taken to reduce incarcerated populations and mitigate the risks associated with COVID-19. These measures are necessary for the public health of all Ohioans, not only those living and working in local incarceration facilities. **As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to intensify, we are writing to urge you to use your authority to ensure that all incarcerated people— including immigrants held by the federal government – are included in your efforts to flatten the curve.**

Cities and counties that collaborate with Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) by sharing information, participating in arrest operations, and holding individuals in jail in order to investigate their immigration status are placing their communities at greater risk for deadly consequences during the COVID-19 public health crisis.

Partnering with ICE perpetuates a fear of immigration enforcement within in the community, which can discourage immigrants and their family members from seeking necessary medical care and gathering essential supplies. If residents of immigrant communities decline to seek medical treatment because they fear immigration enforcement, the impact and reach of COVID-19 could worsen. Our collective safety depends on the ability of people to take preventive measures and seek medical attention without delay.

Not only does this relationship damage community-law enforcement trust, but jailing people for civil immigration purposes further exposes them to the elevated health risks associated with COVID-19 for detained populations. If individuals who have been exposed to COVID-19 are placed in immigration detention, the spread of the virus in detention centers will be swift and unstoppable. This threat increases with each additional person detained and jeopardizes the health and safety of facility staff, as well as the communities they return home to.

It is highly likely the virus has already entered these facilities, and immediate depopulation and other protective measures must be undertaken to mitigate the spread. We acknowledge that ICE detainees are under the federal government's jurisdiction – but local officials can act to protect everyone in their jails, including federal and local detainees, staff, and surrounding communities.

We urge you to implement the following recommendations to mitigate the deadly spread of COVID-19:

- Immediately suspend any ICE collaboration, including contracts with ICE for civil immigration detention bedspace, activities pursuant to 287(g) programs, or partnerships that involve sharing information, investigating, arresting or delaying the release of individuals based on suspected immigration status.
- Cease the practice of holding individuals on immigration detainers and/or ICE administrative warrants.
- Local officials have authority over conditions of confinement. All risk mitigation plans must include depopulation. Additionally, make your jails safer by releasing every detainee you do have jurisdiction over, implementing aggressive social distancing between remaining detainees,

making sanitary products free and widely available, and following other public health recommendations.

- Announce publically steps being taken to implement these recommendations to build trust and confidence in immigrant communities and promote government transparency during these uncertain times.

It is crucial that efforts be made now to limit the number of individuals in detention to mitigate risk in the future. The rapid, impending spread of COVID-19 poses a threat not only to those held in civil detention on the basis of their immigration status, but all Ohioans. Urgent action is needed.

We respectfully request a response no later than April 23rd. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Ohio

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Cleveland, Office of Migration and Refugee Services, Immigration Legal Services Program

CAIR-Ohio

Ohio Immigrant Alliance

Ohio Hispanic Coalition

International Institute of Akron