



March 18, 2020

VIA E-mail to

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Re: ICE enforcement and COVID-19

Dear Directors Peachey, Adducci, Zarlenga, Decker, and Reither,

As COVID-19 continues to spread within our communities and governments move to mitigate the spread, we write with an urgent request to take measures to align the practices of ICE's Detroit Enforcement and Removal Operations Field Office and Ohio Field Offices with the public health need to mitigate the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

Community transmission of COVID-19 is now ongoing in Ohio, and ICE's practices will influence its severity. **If residents of immigrant communities decline to seek medical treatment because they fear immigration enforcement, the impact and spread of COVID-19 could worsen.** We must ensure that people are not deterred from seeking care.

Additionally, 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. And COVID-19's threat to detainees, correctional staff, and the broader community only increases with each additional person detained.

People in congregate environments, which are places where people live, eat, and sleep in close proximity, face increased danger of contracting COVID-19, as already evidenced by the rapid spread of the virus in cruise ships and nursing homes. People who are confined in prisons, jails, and detention centers will find it virtually impossible to engage in the necessary social distancing and hygiene required to mitigate the risk of transmission, even with the best-laid plans.

In short, the more people ICE detains during the COVID-19 pandemic, the more deadly the consequences might be for detainees, correctional staff, and other members of society. Accordingly, we urge you to take four immediate actions to protect the health and safety of us all:

1. Cease all new detentions, and increase use of alternatives to detention. Immigrant detention centers are institutions that uniquely heighten risk of serious harm to people in detention from COVID-19, for which there is no vaccine, known treatment, or cure.
2. Undertake a case-by-case review of all individuals currently in custody and identify those who should be released – starting with older adults and those with underlying medical conditions or disease. Release protects the people with the greatest vulnerability to COVID-19 from transmission of the virus, and also allows for greater risk mitigation for all people held or working in a prison, jail, or detention center. Release of the most vulnerable people from custody also reduces the burden on the region's limited health care infrastructure, as it lessens the likelihood that an overwhelming number of people will become seriously ill from COVID-19 at the same time.

3. Ensure that immigration detainees have adequate and free access to health care, hygiene products, and telephone and other communication services, including confidential calls with attorneys.
4. Issue public statements reaffirming your commitment to treat medical and healthcare facilities, including hospitals and doctors' offices, as "[sensitive locations](#)" where ICE enforcement will not occur – making it clear that accessing care and resources will not expose individuals to, or increase the risk of, immigration enforcement.

Although ICE may previously have made case-by-case determinations regarding detention, these determinations were presumably not made with a global pandemic in mind. It is now critical to recalibrate each of these decisions in light of the urgent public health risks posed by COVID-19.

We hope you will agree that, for the sake of all Ohio residents and communities, customary enforcement practices must be altered to address this pandemic.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this letter with you. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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