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ICE To Start Deporting Imprisoned Children Tomorrow Members of Congress Call for Review of Families' Asylum Cases

ICE plans to begin deporting 26 Black and Brown families with young children who are incarcerated by ICE at the Berks and Dilley family prisons tomorrow, December 18. Earlier this week, a federal court in Washington D.C. lifted the stay of removal that had been protecting these families from being deported. National advocacy groups and members of Congress are calling on U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) to review the families' asylum claims, which were wrongly denied under Trump administration policies which have since been overturned by federal courts. They are also calling on the Department of Homeland Security to halt the deportations.

One father at the Berks detention center said, "We fled Haiti due to government violence against us. We were university students speaking out against human rights abuse, injustice. We were attacked, beaten and barely escaped. [...] We came to the US thinking 'this is where we will find refuge', only to be thrown in prison for more than 8 months. [...] We are human beings too, our children are human beings too and should not have to suffer like this..."

These families were denied the right to seek asylum under Trump administration policies that federal courts have since ruled were unlawful. However, these families were ordered deported under the prior unlawful policies, and ICE is now moving to deport these families quickly. USCIS has the authority to apply the law correctly to allow the asylum claims to be heard in the immigration courts. Members of Congress have called on the federal government to fairly review the families' asylum claims.

Lisette Alvares, a community member with Make the Road PA and Berks County resident said, "I want to live in a world where there are no family jails. These families are being denied the right to have asylum and to stay in this country with their relatives or sponsors and they are likely to face death upon return to their home countries. ICE must stop their deportations now!"

ICE plans to deport these children to face death or torture in their home country. These families, who are from Haiti, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru, Honduras, El Salvador, and Ecuador, have been locked up in unsafe conditions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The government must correctly apply federal law to allow the families to have their asylum claims heard. The Shut Down Berks Coalition and a coalition of national organizations are requesting urgent Congressional intervention to stop the deportations.

Juan David, an 11-year-old at the Dilley family prison in Texas says, "I am detained with my mom. The 27th of [November], we [completed] 15 months of detention. They asked me why I am afraid to return to my country. I'm afraid that the gangsters will hurt me, that they will kill me and my mom. [...] I want to have a normal life, make friends, go to a normal school, be with my family, living a normal life. Here, I always have a headache and anxiety."

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Father at Berks: *"We feel like a canoe in the middle of the ocean, without a place to anchor. We fled Haiti due to government violence against us. We were university students speaking out against human rights abuse, injustice. We were attacked, beaten and barely escaped. My wife was pregnant, they raped her and unfortunately lost the baby due to the sexual assault. We were forced to flee our home. First we went to Chile, where racism and xenophobia forced us out again. We came to the US thinking 'this is where we will find refuge', only to be thrown in prison for more than 8 months. It is extremely painful to watch my baby growing up in this jail where I have absolutely no control over his well being. He is often sick and unable to eat but I am forced to watch my baby crying and can't even help him. We are human beings too, our children are human beings too and should not have to suffer like this..."*

Mother at Berks: *"When I seek out medical attention, ICE puts us in solitary confinement for 30 days, regardless of getting a negative COVID test. We are now afraid of seeking medical care. I had surgery and after the surgery, in the hospital I felt pain in my ear and a noise inside my head. I tried to explain to the doctors what was happening, but no one seems to know what is happening to me. The noise has not stopped, I cannot eat or sleep and I am afraid of being in solitary confinement again if I ask for medical care."*

Marjorie, 9-years-old: *"In these simple words, [I ask] that you help my mom and me to leave and be able to reunite with my family in Los Angeles California. Please I don't want to spend another Christmas or another birthday in this place without being able to play freely and with the fear of being deported. I ask you to know and understand our suffering, we have been locked up here for so long."*

Jhoselyn, 11-years-old and his sisters Zoe, 8 and Emily, 6: *"We have been locked up here for 11 months already, we spent our birthdays here and it's very hard. We don't want to spend Christmas locked up here in this center. We can't play freely or run because the guards yell at us not to. I can't stand it anymore and I cry a lot... Please, I don't want them to separate us. My sisters and I can't go back to Ecuador either."*

Ashlee, 13-years-old: *"I live with my mom and my 5 year old sister Camila, they are all I have... I don't understand why life isn't fair. We need to continue our lives as young people, study and be good people for society. Hopefully you will be able to understand and comprehend, or at least imagine how hard it is to be here for so long and they don't let us leave. May God touch your hearts and have the authority to help us and get us out of here together as one whole family. God bless your lives. What my family and I have lived here I don't wish on your children nor on any child or young person."*

Juan David, 11-years-old: *"I am detained with my mom. The 27th of this month, we will complete 15 months of detention. They asked me why I am afraid to return to my country. I'm afraid that the gangsters will hurt me, that they will kill me and my mom. That's why I ask God to soften the hearts of the asylum officers and that I can go live with my aunt and uncle in New York... I want to have a normal life, make friends, go to a normal school, be with my family, living a normal life. Here, I always have a headache and anxiety."*

Neydi, 10-years-old: *"I don't remember much about my country anymore but when they threatened us a lot my mom brought me to the U.S. so that nothing would happen to me. But now we have been locked up for 14 months in this South Texas jail and I don't want to be here for another Christmas, in this place where we can't play freely. Please help me and my mom to leave this place and be able to spend Christmas with my family in North Carolina."*

Estuardo, 14-years-old: *"I have been jailed here for 13 months together with my mom. I hope that whoever this letter reaches is having a good time and in good health, and that you can help us to leave this place as soon as possible because here there have been too many injustices against us. When I came here they told me that the longest I would be here was 20 days but we have now been here for 13 months without a single good answer... I am a calm and humble boy and I have hope in God that I will have the opportunity to stay in this country because we have suffered a lot in Guatemala. We can't go back..."*

Organizational Sign Ons:

Aldea - The People's Justice Center

Asian Americans United

Asian Arts Initiative

CAIR-Philadelphia

Free Migration Project

Haitian Bridge Alliance

Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees

Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)

Japanese American Citizens League Philadelphia Chapter

Make the Road PA

Movement of Immigrant Leaders in Pennsylvania

National Immigrant Justice Center

NY Day of Remembrance Committee

Pejuang

Philadelphia Asian American Pacific Islander Labor Alliance

Tsuru for Solidarity

VietLead

Woori Center