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# Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus

December 2, 2020

Tony H. Pham  
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director,  
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)  
U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
500 12th St., SW Washington, D.C. 20536

RE: Berks County Residential Center Deportations and Release

Dear Mr. Pham:

We are writing to request that your office provide a stay of deportation and release the children and families being held in the Berks County Residential Center. In particular, there are two children in that facility who have been detained for more than 8 months. These children and their families were denied the right to seek asylum under Trump administration policies that federal courts have since ruled were unlawful. If your office completes plans to deport these families, they face likely death or torture in their home country. In addition, release is warranted because of concerns of unsafe conditions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Both situations violate basic human rights.

Medical experts have warned that detention centers are cramped and unsanitary places where lifesaving social distancing under CDC guidelines is impossible. Families at the BCRC are detained in an enclosed congregate setting with shared bathrooms and communal eating and sleeping areas. The BCRC already has a documented history of medical neglect and outbreaks, in addition to detention itself having been proven to be physically and mentally harmful. COVID-19 further exacerbates these conditions, which will result in a human rights crisis in Berks County unless decisive action to release families is taken immediately.

The two families in Pennsylvania are part of a group of 23 children and 28 families in total who are currently in long-term ICE detention at the Berks and Dilley family prisons. These families from Haiti, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru, Honduras, El Salvador, and Ecuador are now all facing unjust deportation. We join the Shut Down Berks Coalition and a coalition of national organizations in requesting you to stop the deportations and release them immediately.

Family detention goes against our most fundamental values as a society and it is unconscionable to not correct this injustice. In addition to making this request to you, we are again urging our Governor to issue an Emergency Removal Order on the Berks County Residential Center, an action that would comply with various Court decisions. We are also asking our federal counterparts in the US Congress to investigate the practice of family detention and create a more just and fair solution that does not involve hasty, unjust deportations or inhumane and medically dangerous detention.

Regards,

Representative Bullock,  
Chair, Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus

Representative Hohenstein  
Co-chair, Welcoming PA Caucus

Representative Innamorato  
Co-chair, Welcoming PA Caucus

Representative Burgos  
Co-chair, Welcoming PA Caucus



Representative Schlossberg



Representative Sanchez



Representative Rabb



Representative Schweyer



Representative Frankel



Representative Isaacson



Representative Howard

Cc: Governor Tom Wolf  
Simona Flores, Philadelphia ICE Field Office Director  
Pennsylvania Congressional Delegation