



April 21, 2020

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Dear El Paso Sector Chiefs:

Thank you for your service and your work to keep our communities safe. Your offices recently received a letter signed by 28 immigrant advocacy organizations and legal representatives requesting the release of non-violent undocumented immigrants as COVID-19 spreads across the U.S.-Mexico border. These community organizations urged you to consider the imminent danger of holding people in close proximity without personal protective equipment for both detainees and staff at the detention facilities in El Paso.

Out of deep concern for our collective health and safety, we support the request made by these organizations. Releasing non-violent detainees is in the best interest not only of those detained, but also for ICE and CBP employees, and the broader El Paso community.

Currently, hundreds of individuals are detained at ICE and CBP facilities in the El Paso sector. Consequently, a decision to release these detainees requires a clear plan and communications with local organizations who regularly assist detainees with relocation. Both ICE and CBP have worked in partnership with the Annunciation House for decades, and the Annunciation House is prepared to continue its work with you, with the appropriate internal protocols in place to manage individuals who may present with COVID-19 symptoms.

Due to the increasing spread of COVID-19, we urge ICE and CBP to coordinate with local governments, public health agencies, hospitals, and other area stakeholders to plan for both the release of non-violent detainees as well as protocols for spread of COVID-19 within your facilities.

To date, it appears neither CBP nor ICE have disclosed details about specific protocols in place for COVID-19. Legal representatives have shared testimonials from detainees who report a lack of personal protective equipment at any facility, no social distancing, unhygienic conditions, and that cases of COVID-19 among detainees and/or staff are not adequately investigated. Additionally, it has been reported that transfers continue without the release of information regarding the protocol implemented to safely transfer detainees across the country.

As of April 20th, 540 individuals have confirmed positive for COVID-19, and 38 are hospitalized with 13 in ICU. Notably, only 75 ICU beds are available in El Paso. Alarmingly, we have had significant double digit increases for the past week, which suggests that the local rate of infection is increasing quickly.

We know that four CBP agents tested positive for COVID-19 earlier this month. On April 9, 2020, with the help of New Mexico Senator Tom Udall, we confirmed that two cases of COVID-19 (one detainee and one employee) at the Otero facility. In the past several days, at the El Paso Processing Center (EPPC), four people were confirmed positive. If these cases were to lead to an outbreak at the Otero or the EPPC facility or another facility where detainees are held, our local health care system would reach a breaking point within days.

Consequently, we ask that your agencies work collaboratively with local governments, public health agencies, hospitals, and other area stakeholders to plan for both the release of detainees and the protocols for detecting and treating COVID-19 in your facilities.

In addition, we ask that you share information about any existing COVID-19 protocols with the local agencies and advocates who are managing pandemic response and interacting with the immigration system. It is critical that we understand the protocols you have in place, including:

- how infections are reported,
- how people are screened before transport,
- whether people are socially distanced as recommended by the CDC,
- if people are provided facial coverings as recommended by the CDC,
- whether temperatures are monitored regularly,
- whether sufficient PPE is available, and
- how are those who test positive isolated.

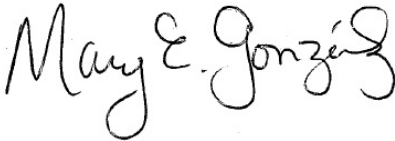
We are in an unprecedented and uncertain time that requires all of us and the agencies we represent to work together. We want to thank you in advance for your willingness to ensure that the health and safety of all people are at the forefront of your decision-making.

Please feel free to contact our offices with any information or questions you may have.

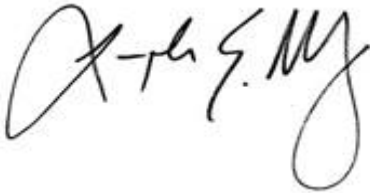
Sincerely,



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