

6/2/2020

Dear Committee:

We are health professionals and students from the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus and we represent Students for Immigrant Health and Rights (SIHR) and Doctors for Camp Closure (D4CC).

Thank you for taking the time to discuss this important issue. We are strong supporters of HB20-1409 because it would provide basic public health accountability in detention facilities noted for their medical neglect.

ICE currently has no independent oversight and they have not provided adequate internal oversight. Across the nation they have routinely neglected to uphold public health standards in their contractor facilities. The Aurora ICE detention center -- operated by the GEO Group -- reflects the same practices of medical neglect.

While the pandemic highlights the urgency of detainee medical needs, it arrives against a backdrop of ongoing negligence. This medical neglect was well-documented prior to the COVID-19 (aka SARS-CoV-2) pandemic. The 2019 Colorado ACLU report [*Cashing In On Cruelty*](#) cites multiple examples of medical negligence. The report opens with the story of Kamyar Samimi who died of medical neglect in 2017 after only two weeks in Aurora's ICE facility. The report advocates for oversight and accountability as a means to prevent such wanton neglect for human health.

More recently, the story of Oscar Perez Aguirre has emerged. A 58-year-old man with hypertension and cardiomegaly, he contracted SARS-CoV-2 while in detention in the Aurora GEO Detention Center. Guards gave his family conflicting information on whether he had tested positive for the virus. His medical care was delayed before he was ultimately hospitalized. He was returned to ICE detention before being symptom-free, and was denied antipyretic medications for his ongoing fever.

As medical professionals we strongly believe that all people have a right to access to medical care, including access to preventative care and care of chronic illness. These principles hold true for all patients in our community and are especially apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the ongoing pandemic, we have seen a disproportionate mortality burden fall on communities of color and vulnerable populations across the country. Detained immigrants are at especially elevated risk for contracting the SARS-CoV-2 virus given that they are confined in closely detained spaces. If they contract the virus they are at risk for poor outcomes as they have often received poor medical care in detention for years. Those detained in Aurora's ICE

detention facility — less than one mile from our medical campus — report wholly insufficient protection provided to detainees. We have heard reports that guards are not wearing masks. We have heard that despite promising detainees three new masks each week, they are routinely left to wear the same mask for weeks. Cells are too small to allow the six feet of space recommended for social distancing. Until we have a vaccine, prevention is our best shield against the spread of the virus. Aurora's ICE facility has not shown themselves capable of rigorously employing these practices to shield detainees.

As of Friday, May 29 there are reports of 11 cases of SARS-CoV-2 among detainees in Aurora's ICE detention facility. We want to emphasize that these patients were diagnosed because they were sick- not because of wide-scale testing for the virus across the facility. We have no idea how many people currently in detention have contracted the virus. We also don't know how many immigrants may have contracted the virus and been deported because they were sick without ever getting tested. We do know that as of April 15th 1,201 out of the 2,394 immigrants in ICE custody nationally who have been tested for COVID have tested positive for the virus. Colorado currently has no oversight over these facilities.

We, as Coloradans, currently cannot demand that people detained in these facilities receive testing. Lawmakers cannot demand widespread testing. The people detained in these facilities are our friends, neighbors, husbands, wives... our patients. We desperately need to pass HB20-1409 so that CDPHE can have the same oversight over these facilities as prisons, jails and other penal institutions. This is a low bar. We are asking for the bare minimum so that our state can help ensure that detention is not a death sentence!

Thank you for your attention to these issues which are among the most fundamental of human rights. We ask you to please support HB20-1409.

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