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Thank you to the members of the committee for the consideration of this important bill. My name is Feven Berhanu, I am submitting this testimony in support of HB20-1409 on behalf of Colorado People's Alliance, which has a membership of over 300 Coloradans.

HB20-1409 would ensure that private detention facilities around Colorado, facilities which have failed to regulate and hold themselves accountable, will meet the standards of the state in regard to health and other conditions. In a January 2019 report, the Office of Inspector General, the independent federal body in charge of monitoring ICE, stated that ICE does not adequately hold detention facility contractors accountable for not meeting crucial standards of performance and conditions. Many private detention facilities enter contracts with ICE that allows them a dangerous flexibility to escape transparency and accountability to the community, quite literally putting the lives of detainees and staff at risk by mismanaging public illness outbreaks (which becomes of increasing concern since 11 detainees tested positive for COVID-19 in May) and medically neglecting detainees. The safety and health needs of our state are continuously undermined, and detention facilities like GEO feel absolutely no need to communicate with local officials. In January 2019, the GEO group signed a 90 day contract with ICE to open their remodeled annex building without any notice to local governments including vital health and safety agencies like Police or Firefighters or the health department. On April 16, 2019, ICE signed a contract to extend the use of the annex building for another year. None of this happened in coordination with localities, which raises concerns as to what else this facility can do in our community without any oversight. It is a crisis of public health and safety that the current pandemic exacerbates.

Furthermore, The GEO Detention Facility in Aurora has proven itself to be a violently inhospitable place for the immigrants it detains, recorded to have inflicted multiple abuses against them. These abuses include psychiatric torture through long periods of solitary confinement, several preventable illness outbreaks of mumps, measles, chicken pox, more recently COVID-19, inadequate nutrition with some reported issues of expired food, forced labor for only \$1 a day, and consistent medical neglect that has led to the 20-25 day quarantine of 357 individuals at one time in March 2019 due to virus outbreaks like chickenpox and mumps. In 2019, there was an infectious outbreak for 7 out of 12 months of the year (February 2019-March 2019 - Mumps/Chicken Pox, July 2019-August 2019 - Mumps/Chicken Pox, October 2019-November 2019 - Mumps/Chicken Pox, December 2019 - Scabies).

There have been two reported deaths in the facility, Kamyar Samimi who died on Dec. 2, 2017 and Evalin-Ali Mandza, died April 12, 2012. The ACLU filed a federal lawsuit on April 9, 2019 for information regarding the death of Kamyar Samimi. More than a year after his death, the ACLU confirmed that his death was indeed preventable had GEO's medical response been better and more timely. In March 2020, during the COVID-19 global pandemic, the GEO Detention center reported that 11 detainees tested positive by the end of May. This was a

preventable outbreak, because it was linked to the transfer of a detainee from the Sterling Correctional Facility, a facility publicly known to have had hundreds of positive cases at the time. During Colorado's shelter in place order, detainees were subject to being held in their pods of 6-8 people for 23 hours per day, only allowed 1 hour to shower, use the phone, and eat. It was

not until COPA and other organizations pressured GEO that this was lifted. This facility has acted unchecked for too long and has only acted for the sole purpose of their own profit, putting our communities at risk in the meantime. The Aurora city council has acted to their maximum capacity and jurisdiction, so it is time for the state to intervene.

I have spent the last 2 years meeting and talking with detainees about the conditions of the center. I will never forget the story of one person in particular. Her name was Brenda. Brenda shared with me that the food at GEO is basically inedible, and said that people are going hungry and can't afford the commissary. In tears, she told me that the guards have made it harder for those inside to have enough food-- they often throw away stored fruits that were ripening and food leftovers without announcing it. She shared with me that the microwave is outside of the center, and detainees must go outside to heat up their food, and sometimes they are left outside in the cold for an hour before someone unlocks the door. Brenda also shared with me that they only receive ibuprofen, no matter the condition or severity of pain they are experiencing. One time, her friend slipped in the shower and hurt her ankle which led to one of her bones protruding, and they still only gave her ibuprofen. When there are protests, the guards board up the window as to not allow the detainees to see the groups supporting them from the outside. Brenda tearfully shared with me that she does not mind not seeing the sky and the sun, as long as it means that someone is out there fighting for her.

Colorado cannot and should not stand for this kind of abuse. Now is the time to show up not just for the public health of detainees and staff of immigrant detention but for their surrounding communities. HB20-1409 is first step toward taking back our state from these corporations who have no regard for the lives of human beings. Colorado MUST act now, and pass HB20-1409.