

6/3/20

Colorado General Assembly:

We are urging you to pass state policy to prevent a public health crisis in immigrant detention centers across Colorado. Colorado must conduct inspections of all facilities that are detaining immigrants for civil immigration purposes, including the Aurora GEO Detention Center, and the Devereux child detention facility for unaccompanied minors.

It's not just the moral thing to do, it is about the protection of all Coloradans from preventable outbreak and transmission of infectious diseases like COVID-19. Some facilities are currently able to escape state inspections, making it so there is no way for the state to ensure that they are meeting state health standards and are adequately addressing the unprecedented dangers of COVID-19. Medical professionals around the world have made clear that this virus will not just go away; a vaccine for this novel coronavirus is still a year to a year and a half away.

Right now, these facilities have shown an inability to provide an adequate level of basic medical care even absent a world-wide pandemic. The GEO Detention facility in Aurora has been responsible for several outbreaks of communicable diseases over the past few years, such as mumps, chickenpox, and measles; diseases that are preventable by vaccines. After each illness outbreak, GEO did not improve on the health conditions of the facility, or their processes for medical response. They have had several opportunities to change their procedures and improve their conditions, yet another illness outbreak would always follow the last. Over the past decade, two people have died in this facility from medical neglect.

The Devereux child detention facility is detaining children on behalf of the federal government who have survived trauma in their home countries, during their migration. The intake processes for these children are severely underdeveloped; medical evaluations are being conducted by nurses at the facility who are not properly trained to evaluate the kids. They are not testing the kids for sexually transmitted diseases, communicative diseases, parasitic infections, etc. Not only that, but none of the staff are trained on trauma informed care and there is no child psychologist on staff to provide mental health care. It was only after complaints that the facility hired a mental health provider as a consultant, however, they are not fully being integrated to provide this care to the children. Additionally, they have nurses who are not properly trained doing medical evaluations on the children, and there have been frequent complaints about children not receiving medication.

These conditions are unacceptable. Every person held in the state of Colorado should be ensured a basic level of public health and safety. We owe our community members who are in detention, or who have loved ones in detention, the very minimum assurance that these detention facilities will be held to the same standard as any penal institution in the state. Colorado must bring these facilities under state jurisdiction immediately for the safety of detainees, staff, and our larger community.

Respectfully,

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