

My name is Ana Banuelos, and I am submitting testimony in support of HB20-1409, to allow CDPHE Inspections of Penal Institutions.

This bill is important to me, because my husband was detained in the GEO Detention Facility in Aurora for 6 months, and was only released very recently. He endured so much unnecessary suffering to his health while he was there. My husband had a very difficult time getting the medical attention he needed, and they wouldn't give him the medications as directed by the doctor. If the medication was supposed to be given every 6 hours, he would go without it for 12 to 14 hours. This led to frequent infections on his leg, and things continued to get worse. Eventually, he couldn't even walk, so they gave him crutches but still had him on the second floor, struggling to get down the stairs to receive his medicine. He would request to be on the waiting list to see an actual doctor (not a nurse), and they would tell him to wait a week. He later found out that he wasn't even on the waitlist because they forgot to add him. My husband once told me that some of the detainees have complaints against the guards, and when they tried to report them, one guard responded, "what are they going to do to me? Half of the time the kites don't even go through, so no one knows what's happening."

My husband just barely was free from the facility while they were beginning to mismanage their COVID-19 response. Nearing his release, my husband told me that when the pandemic started, the guards weren't wearing gloves or masks and no one was sanitizing. I can't imagine how detainees still currently in the facility must feel, especially after the announcement on May 22 that 2 detainees tested positive for the virus because of the GEO's carelessness. The whole time he was in there, I was constantly having to advocate for my husband to the sergeants and lieutenants, with the help of my son. But I shouldn't have had to push so hard for them to treat my husband with basic respect. I shouldn't have had to worry about taking care of my family while also having to hold this corporation accountable for his basic needs during his detention. That facility, and all private immigrant detention facilities need accountability. Otherwise, they don't communicate with families, neglect the needs of detainees, and put lives like my husband's at risk. No family should have to endure what I went through just to make sure their loved one survives detention. It would make a world of difference for families like mine if this bill was passed, so that these private facilities are held accountable. State inspection of private detention facilities in Colorado is a crucial and needed measure to make sure they are meeting state guidelines, and to make sure detainees are being treated with basic respect.