

President Biden, The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Washington, DC 20500

March 2021

Dear President Biden,

I am heartened by the steps this Administration has taken to direct the U.S. immigration system toward policies that honor human rights. However, policies have not yet been implemented to protect those already in ICE detention.

I am concerned about the health and safety of detainees who are at high risk in public and private ICE immigration facilities. Jailing people in ICE detention centers awaiting asylum or deportation hearings is costly and harmful. People navigating their immigration cases should be able to do so in the community, not behind bars.

Immigrants should be treated with dignity and compassion. Detained immigrants are at heightened risk of serious illness or death as the COVID-19 virus is especially communicable in crowded, indoor spaces. Many immigration detainees are survivors of violence and torture with untreated mental health issues.

ICE should conduct a file review process with individuals immediately released. The vast majority of those detained have family members waiting to house and support them upon release. For those who do not, community-based support programs are ready to provide services. A study just released by American Immigration Council shows that over 11-years, 96% of all *non-detained* individuals with counsel appeared in court for every one of their hearings.¹ The *Alternatives To Detention* program should be reinstated.

Please fulfill your commitment to restoring humanity to the immigration process by recognizing that detention has no place in the system. Leaving behind the thousands who continue to suffer in detention will undermine efforts by your agencies to rebuild trust with the American people.

I appreciate your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

¹ <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/measuring-absentia-removal-immigration-court>