

September 26, 2019

House Oversight Committee Chair
Rep. Elijah Cummings
2163 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

House Committee on Homeland Security
Rep. Bennie Thompson
H2-176 Ford House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Request for Investigation of Abusive Treatment of Detained Individuals at Bossier and Pine Prairie Detention Centers

Dear Representatives Cummings and Thompson:

On August 29, 2019, a concerned coalition¹ reached out to Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”) and called for an investigation of violent and unlawful responses by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) and its subcontractors at the Bossier Medium Security Facility in Plain Dealing, Louisiana, and at Pine Prairie ICE Processing Center in Pine Prairie, Louisiana. To date, almost a month has passed with no response or acknowledgment of this letter, attached here.

ICE reported that “the number of detainees in facilities contracted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Louisiana and Mississippi surged from just over 2,000 at the end of 2017 to more than 8,000 as of July [2019].”² This is after Congress directed ICE in February to decrease immigrant detention.³ Not only has ICE blatantly disregarded Congressional direction, but they also continue to mistreat and violate the due process rights and protected speech of detained immigrants with impunity. In early August, it was reported to us from numerous detained persons that ICE and its contractors at Bossier and Pine Prairie, which is operated by for-profit

¹ Including the ACLU of Louisiana, Al Otro Lado, Americans for Immigrant Justice, Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta, Detention Watch Network, Freedom for Immigrants, Innovation Law Lab, ISLA, Just Detention International, Kentucky Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice, Project Ishamel – First Grace Community Alliance, Project South, RAICES, Southern Poverty Law Center, Taos Immigrant Allies, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights, and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

² *ICE Detentions Durge in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alarming Immigration Advocates*, Aaron Franco, Morgan Radford and Julia Ainsley, *NBC News*, Aug. 15, 2019.

³ *Congress Told ICE to Detain Fewer People. Instead It Keeps Adding Private Prisons*, Noah Lanard, *Mother Jones*, Aug. 22, 2019.

GeoGroup, responded with unlawful force to detained immigrants peacefully protesting their indefinite and inhumane detention conditions.

One of the 120 brave protestors at Pine Prairie, J.L.H., recounts: “[About fifty] officers dressed in head-to-toe black riot gear with shields, helmets, vests, and masks began to exit the building. [...] Between the gas, the pepper spray, and the bullets, we were completely annihilated. [...] We had started shouting, asking for mercy. We asked them to stop shooting us, but Warden Ramos and the riot police continued in their attack against all of us. [...] I never expected an attack so brutal on a group of peaceful and defenseless human beings.” Many of these peaceful protestors were subsequently put in overcrowded solitary confinement cells, some for up to a month. At least one individual reported that he abandoned his asylum claim and requested to be deported, directly as a result of being held in prolonged solitary confinement. “We are immigrants who had come to this country fleeing violence, seeking refuge, and somehow we ended up here, hidden from public view in rural Louisiana. They do what they want to us here.”⁴

The lack of oversight of ICE and its contractors, and the impunity with which they operate, is unacceptable. Without any response from the Office of the Inspector General, it seems that ICE and DHS will again go unsanctioned for their heinous and illegal acts. We know through prior communication with you that the Oversight Committee & the Committee on Homeland Security are interested in addressing ICE’s abuse of power in the Deep South, and we appreciate your commitment. **Now, we implore you to hold ICE and DHS accountable by conducting your own investigation into these troubling incidents as soon as possible and publicly releasing the results.**

We thank you very much for your time and attention. Please feel free to contact us should you have any questions or require any additional information.

Signed September 26, 2019,

Jaclyn Cole, Outreach Paralegal at the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)
Jeff Migliozi, Communications Associate, SPLC
Katrina Huber, Southeast Immigrant Freedom Initiative Coordinator, SPLC
Luz Lopez, Senior Supervising Attorney, SPLC
Marissa Gaston, Digital Media Associate, SPLC
Rose Murray, Direct Services Attorney, SPLC
Victoria Mesa, Senior Staff Attorney, SPLC

⁴ Declaration of J.L.H., August 15, 2019.