

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 1, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The President of The United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Subject: Terminate ICE contract at the Berks County Residential Center

Dear President Biden,

We urge the President and the Department of Homeland Security to end its contract with the Berks County Residential Center (“Berks Detention Center”) immediately. As members of the Pennsylvania Congressional Delegation, we lend our voice to the chorus of more than 50 state officials from throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and nearly 10,000 members of the public whose concerns were ignored.

The recent announcement that the Berks Detention Center will house only women provides no relief to a disastrous situation. There are years of documented incidents of sexual assault in Hutto Detention Center, an all-women’s detention center, to include a survivor of sexual assault who was locked in solitary confinement for 60 hours in retaliation for speaking out. Just last year, in Irwin County Detention Center--another all-women’s detention center--more than 40 women attested to non-consensual, medically invasive gynecological procedures, including forced sterilization.

In response to these actions, in May of this year, The Biden Administration announced it would stop detaining women at Irwin. Sadly, these tragic situations are not unique to Irwin or Hutto. Berks County paid a \$75,000 settlement last year to a Honduran woman to avoid trial on her allegations of repeated sexual assault at Berks Detention Center. This incident follows years of documented medical neglect, forced labor, mistreatment, and sexual abuse at detention centers across the country. We unequivocally stand against new plans to detain, process, incarcerate, or subject immigrant women or any other people to federal actions within the facility.

Incarcerating asylum seekers, whether they are women, families, or children, is cruel, inhumane, abusive, and unnecessary. Furthermore, it is a violation not only of American civil liberties, but international human rights. In the midst of a global pandemic, placing women into detention centers that have a demonstrated increased risk of harm and death to detainees and a demonstrated track record of sexual violence is unconscionable.

Berks will have the shameful distinction of being the only women’s immigration detention center in the northeast. The Commonwealth should not be in the business of jailing women who seek asylum or other legal protections when community-based alternatives exist. Furthermore, local elected officials have committed to locate funding to support the facility’s use for non-carceral purposes to provide human services to the surrounding community.

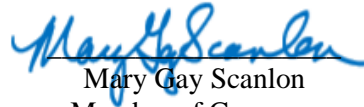
As elected leaders representing the communities of Pennsylvania, we ask the White House and the Department of Homeland Security to terminate the contract between

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Berks County in order to end the federal use of the Berks Detention Center. I urge you to work to cancel the contract immediately and to end this injustice in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,



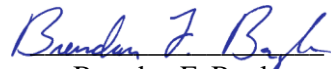
Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress



Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress



Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress