



October 21, 2015

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of the State of Texas
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, TX 78711-2428

The Honorable John J. Specia, Jr.
Commissioner
Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
701 West 51st Street
Austin, TX 78751

Dear Governor Abbott and Commissioner Specia,

We write to you to express concerns in response to the recent emergency rulemaking actions that have lowered, rather than raised, standards for licensing by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) of the Karnes County Residential Center in Karnes City and the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley. We strongly encourage DFPS to take immediate and unrelenting action to ensure the safety, health and well-being of the women, children and families held in these detention centers.

We also urge DFPS to refrain from the premature licensing of these facilities under weakened standards simply to assist the federal government come into technical compliance with federal district court's order in *Flores v. Lynch*, while not addressing the well-being of those being detained. Such action greatly risks the agency putting its stamp of approval on existing conditions rather than ensuring the welfare of the women and children being held in these prison-like facilities.

Sadly, overwhelming evidence demonstrating significant psychological and developmental harm family detention on women and children detained at the Karnes County Residential Center and the South Texas Family Residential Center confirms these families continue to languish and deteriorate in prison-like facilities for months on end under neglectful, deplorable and abusive conditions after fleeing violence and fear in their home countries.

The Department of Homeland Security's current policy of family detention is inconsistent with our nation's values and respect for human decency and of providing refuge for those fleeing violence, repression and fear. We have called on the Department of Homeland Security to end its inhumane policy of family detention and we now call on the State of Texas to stand up for the tired, poor huddled masses caged within its borders yearning to breathe free.

With this in mind, we urge DFPS to refrain from prematurely licensing the Karnes and Dilly detention centers while acting with all the diligence and urgency demanded in this situation to ensure the safety, health and welfare of the women and children at these family detention centers. We stand ready to work with you to meet those goals and thank you in advance for your attention and consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Reelin Hinijasa

Inde Kany

Beto O'Rourke

Jeddie Bernice Johnson

Al Green

MV

Joaquin Castro

Chih-fan Lu

Hal Daggert

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