

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 1, 2014

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Johnson,

We write to express our serious concern with the decision by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to expand family detention to 6,350 beds. We are also troubled with the opening of the family detention facility in Artesia, New Mexico, the recent conversion of the Karnes County Detention Center in Texas to family detention, and the expansion of ties with private prison corporations that profit from the incarceration of migrant individuals. The arrival to the United States of children and families fleeing violence in Central America is a grave humanitarian issue. Our government should not detain women and young children who are seeking asylum and refuge.

The use of family detention facilities to house adults traveling with their children is particularly concerning due to the poor treatment that people have experienced in these facilities, specifically at the T. Don Hutto Detention Center (Hutto). In 2007, Hutto was the subject of a lawsuit due to the poor conditions to which children were subject to within the family detention facility. In addition, other groups reported inadequate prenatal care for women, insufficient recreational activities for the physical and mental well-being of children, inappropriate disciplinary practices, and poor nutrition, among other concerns.¹ Many of these concerns are still reported today in adult detention facilities, which make the decision to invest in facilities for children all the more concerning. Like other immigration detention centers, the standards that govern family detention facilities are not codified into law. While the performance outcomes of facilities may be positive goals, there must be more accountability when those standards are not met.

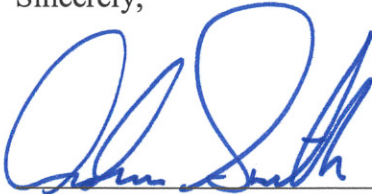
In 2009, the Administration ended the use of Hutto for family detention and later withdrew plans for three new family detention centers. We believe that was the correct decision. It is our belief that families and children should be treated with dignity and respect as they await adjudication of their administrative immigration cases. Children should be placed in the least restrictive settings in accordance with the Flores Settlement, which mandates that the government release a minor from its custody without unnecessary delay as long as detention is not required to ensure a child's appearance in immigration court or for safety reasons.

¹ Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, & Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. (February 2007) *Locking up family values: The Detention of Immigrant Families*. Retrieved from www.womensrefugeecommission.org/programs/migrant-rights/research-and-resources/150-locking-up-family-values-the-detention-of-immigrant-families/file+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us

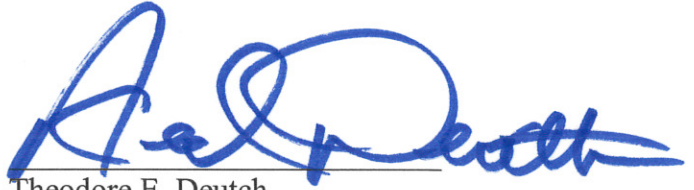
Given the history of family detention centers and the unique needs of women and children fleeing violence, we encourage you to consider the use of alternatives to detention, particularly those that include case management and support for families that are seeking asylum. Alternatives to detention have proven to be effective with a 97.4 percent compliance rate and cost a fraction of the \$160 per day of maintaining an adult detention bed. Alternatives to detention should be a priority for families in civil immigration proceedings.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing from you on this issue and to working with you in the near future.

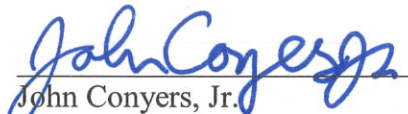
Sincerely,



Adam Smith
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Theodore E. Deutch
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



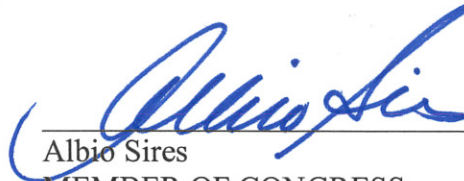
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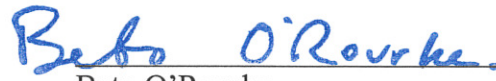
Alan Lowenthal
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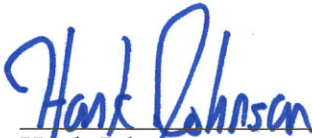
Albio Sires
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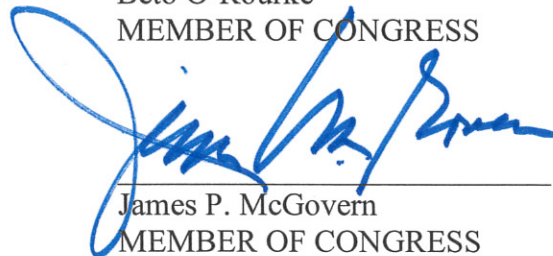
Barbara Lee
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



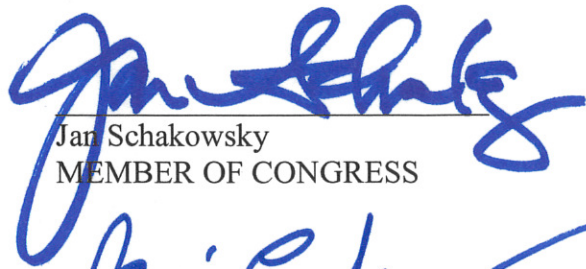
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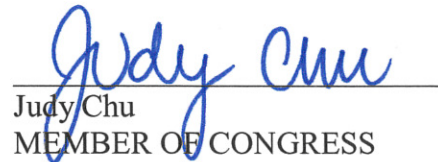
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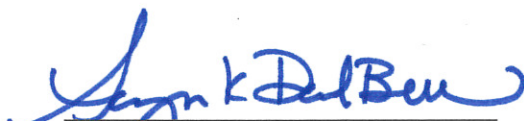
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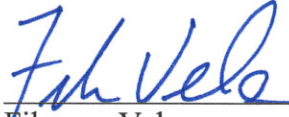
Suzan DelBene
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Tony Cardenas
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Rick Larsen
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Handwritten signature of Filemon Vela in blue ink.

Filemon Vela
MEMBER OF CONGRESS