December 5, 2014

William Powers, Jr.
President
The University of Texas at Austin
Office of the President
110 Inner Campus Drive, Stop G3400
Austin, Texas 78712-3400

Dear President Powers:

We, the undersigned faculty members of the University of Texas at Austin, are alarmed to learn of the role Red McCombs is playing in the construction of a 2,400-bed family detention center in Dilley, Texas. The Dilley detention center will be the largest in the country and will house families, mainly mothers and young children, most of whom are seeking asylum or related protection in the United States.

The Koontz-McCombs firm, headed by its Chairman and COO Red McCombs, has leased its own land for the construction of this massive detention center. By doing so, Koontz-McCombs is supporting the dramatic expansion of private for-profit family detention centers. The Dilley detention center will be managed by the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) and will expand the jailing of mothers and children who are escaping violent victimization in Central America by twofold. This expansion of family detention is opposed by child welfare advocates, public health and environmental impact experts, immigration and human rights lawyers, members of faith-based communities, and many others. Family detention also contravenes international human rights principles requiring that detention of immigrants be used as a last resort and prohibiting detention of children and asylum seekers except in the most extreme circumstances, which are not present here.

The moral, physical, and legal dangers posed by the new detention center in Dilley have been well catalogued. We mention only a few here but link below to letters from non-governmental organizations, associations of immigration lawyers, law professors and pro bono counsel, and law faculty from the Civil Rights Clinic at the University of Texas at Austin that carefully detail the harm and rights violations committed by detaining refugee children and families.

• Family detention hinders the legal rights of the most vulnerable asylum seekers.
• Family detention causes permanent harm to the physical and mental health of young children, compounding the trauma they have experienced in their home countries.
• Family detention is unnecessary. Most asylum seekers appear for their immigration proceedings after release from detention. Many asylum seeking mothers and children have family in the United States where they can live while pursuing their asylum cases
and enjoy the support of religious and other communities. Alternatives to detention, such as reporting requirements, can ensure appearance in court and are more humane and more cost effective.

• The Dilley detention center will be managed by a private prison company with a problematic record.

• International human rights law is clear that family detention violates the universal rights of children.

Red McCombs is a proud and generous friend of the University of Texas at Austin. His love for the university has won him respect and admiration from many Longhorns. He is honored in the football stadium with a statue in the Red McCombs Red Zone. The business school bears his name. Given UT’s special relationship with Red McCombs, we think it appropriate for the university to ask him to reconsider the lease in Dilley. The business arrangement that allows for the opening of the Dilley facility puts Red McCombs and his business at the center of the immoral expansion of family detention. The UT administration should bring this reality to his attention.


Sincerely,

Michael P. Young  
Associate Professor  
Department of Sociology

Along with:

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