



# City of Austin

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February 23, 2018

Re: Public official access to T. Don Hutto detention center and immediate release of Laura Monterrosa

Dear Mr. Bible, Ms. Lacy, and Mr. Castro,

We write you express deep concerns about the continued detainment of Laura Monterrosa, an asylum-seeking LGBT woman from El Salvador who has been detained at the T. Don Hutto Residential Center in Taylor, Texas for nine months.

As you know, over the last three months, Ms. Monterrosa has stated that she has suffered sexual assault by a guard inside the facility. Community members have informed us that she has faced solitary confinement and that she reported threats from officials if she did not recant her statement. We understand that she has made an attempt on her life and remains suicidal, and that the FBI has an active investigation into her alleged sexual assault.

First, we are writing you to ask that you release Ms. Monterrosa immediately.

Following national media coverage of Ms. Monterrosa's ordeal, Austin City Council Member Greg Casar attempted to visit her, and he was denied entrance by staff of CoreCivic, the private prison company that operates the facility, even though other members of the public are allowed to enter at their convenience. At the time of his visit, Council Member Casar was told he was not allowed to visit the facility because of the media attention on the matter.

Second, we call on you to immediately allow access to public officials to visit Ms. Monterrosa. To bar officials from entering a detention center because they represent the public, or because they may speak to the media about what they see, raises dire questions about freedom of speech and the transparency of these facilities. We understand that you have sent Council Member Casar paperwork to fill out and additional procedures in order to allow him entry: these procedures could bar him and other elected officials from visiting Ms. Monterrosa for weeks. We do not believe it is right for elected officials to face additional barriers, applied selectively to some members of the public and not others, to enter a federal facility on such an urgent matter.

Furthermore, we are deeply concerned that continued detention will be harmful for Ms. Monterrosa's health and call you on to release her immediately from detention. In our community, we strive to welcome refugees and asylum seekers. Our non-profit community has stepped and offered to support Ms. Monterrosa if ICE releases her. Please, consider the health and well-being of the 23 year-old woman in your custody, who up to this date has been convicted of no crime. There is no legal or moral justification for her continued detention.

We look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible to address this urgent matter. Please release Ms. Monterrosa immediately, and please allow public officials to meet with her immediately without additional delay through arbitrary procedures.

Sincerely,

Council Member Delia Garza, District 2  
Council Member Sabino "Pio" Renteria, District 3  
Council Member Greg Casar, District 4