

# EXHIBIT

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**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

<u>Ángel Alejandro Heredia Mons et al.</u>	)	
	)	
<i>Plaintiffs,</i>	)	
	)	
v.	)	<b>Civ. No.: 1:19-cv-01593</b>
	)	
<b>Kevin K. McALEENAN et al.</b>	)	
	)	
<i>Defendants/Respondents.</i>	)	
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**DECLARATION OF LAURA G. RIVERA, ESQ.**

I, Laura G. Rivera, Esq., make this declaration on my personal knowledge and if called to testify, I could and would do so competently as follows:

1. I serve as the Director of the Southeast Immigrant Freedom Initiative of the Southern Poverty Law Center (“SIFI”). SIFI provides pro bono representation to detained immigrants in proceedings before the Executive Office for Immigration Review (“EOIR”) and U.S. Immigration and Customs and Enforcement (“ICE”). SIFI, established in 2017, has represented hundreds of individuals confined under the jurisdiction of the New Orleans ICE Field Office. Most SIFI cases focus on decarceration.

2. Most of the clients SIFI represents under the jurisdiction of the New Orleans ICE Field Office are confined inside the LaSalle Detention Center (“LaSalle”) in Jena, Louisiana, and Pine Prairie ICE Processing Center (“Pine Prairie”) in Pine Prairie, Louisiana. SIFI has also represented clients at the Adams County Correctional Center in Natchez, Mississippi, the River Correctional Center in Monroe, Louisiana, and the Winn Correctional Center in Winnfield, Louisiana.



5. Not even the COVID-19 pandemic and the attendant danger it pose

8. Up until then, I had provided SIFI staff with gloves, disinfectant wipes, and hand sanitizer, but not masks or eye protection. Not knowing which of the two statements would prevail, and out of an abundance of caution, that same day I mailed by overnight delivery several packages containing surgical masks to five SIFI staff members. The masks were not N-95 masks. Despite trying to procure them locally, I had been unable to, given the national shortage of those masks. Even if I had been able to procure them, SIFI's use of N-95 masks would have taken those masks out of circulation for use by frontline health care providers, in contravention of the priorities urged by public health experts.

9. The next day, on March 24, 2020, ICE issued updated guidance:



10. In essence, then, ICE maintains that contact visitation is not allowed unless legal workers procure and use N-95 masks. Given that SIFI Pine Prairie legal teams or any other SIFI legal representatives cannot obtain N-95 masks for use due to the critical shortage of N-95 masks across the country, this new N-95 mask standard virtually ensures that no legal visitation will occur at Pine Prairie.

**LaSalle Detention Center, Jena, LA**

11. On March 20, 2020, the New Orleans ICE Field Office denied release on parole to two SIFI clients with medical complications who are confined inside LaSalle. The clients, asylum seekers, have both engaged in a hunger strike for about 140 days. Their strike is rooted in their

frustration with the way the immigration courts have treated their pleas for asylum, and, as the duration of their confinement lengthens, their desperation at being locked up, separated from family. Before the novel coronavirus was declared a pandemic, SIFI filed initial parole requests. They contained evidence from a leading medical expert in detainee health attesting that they are medically vulnerable, and documents showing they pose no risk to public safety and no flight risk, having sponsors willing to host them upon release. ICE denied their parole requests.

12. After the outbreak, SIFI renewed these requests, citing to the COVID-19 pandemic as a changed circumstance, and adding new supporting evidence. Yet, again, ICE denied release. ICE has since begin to force feed them via nasogastric tubes. Given the available data on the high rates of transmission of the novel coronavirus and the most likely method of transmission through droplets entering the mucosa, force feeding medically fragile individuals inside likely contaminated detention center medical wings may compound their risk of infection.

13. Over the past week, SIFI staff have learned that ICE and facility staff have used force to respond to confined individuals' clamor for their own health and safety. On March 26, 2020, a woman inside LaSalle called SIFI'

or clean their area. All but one toilet is broken, meaning close to 80 people must share one toilet.

Staff told them they were out of toilet paper. When soap runs out, she said, it is

wearing riot gear, and also the assistant warden. As at LaSalle, ICE confirmed the incident in a published report and explained ICE or its agents used pepper spray against those in its custody.<sup>4</sup>

18. The escalating dangers to people in ICE custody make it all the more important for SIFI staff to maintain contact with clients and potential clients in confinement. A SIFI legal worker conducted in-person visitation with several individuals at Pine Prairie on March 16 and March 20, 2020. She wore a mask and gloves both times. The first time, she observed that none of the facility staff or detained people wore masks or gloves. That day, she me



