

March 13, 2020

John Tsoukaris
Atlanta Field Office Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs
Enforcement
180 Ted Turner Drive SW
Atlanta, Georgia 30-

tion and Customs Enforcement
, Suite 325
Louisiana 70113

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Dear Field Office Directors Tsoukaris, Witte, and Moore, Assistant Field Office Director Diaz, Wardens Donahue, Paulk, Gartland, Staiger, and Cole, Major Henson, and Sheriffs Ramsay, Miller, and Rhoden: p

As nonprofit legal organizations, we the undersigned write in the name of thousands of human beings confined across the Deep South by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and its contractors CoreCivic, GEO Group, and other for-profit prison companies to address your response of the new coronavirus (COVID-19), a disease the World Health Organization has characterized as a global pandemic.¹

We hereby urge you to stem the impending spread of COVID-19 amo

our clients' families, friends, and other individuals who regularly visit the facilities are at risk too. During a mumps outbreak at Pine Prairie ICE Processing Center in early 2019, detainees were unable to access counsel and other legal resources. Entire dorms were quarantined for extended periods. Attorneys were unable to meet with detainees in quarantined dorms in person or via video call, entirely preventing confidential communication between attorneys and detainees subject to quarantine. Detainees in quarantined dorms were also prevented from visiting the law library or participating in Legal Orientation Programs. At least one of our clients requested voluntary departure after the quarantine prevented him from communicating with his attorney prior to his master calendar hearing.

In early 2019, the Stewart Detention Center suffered a mumps outbreak. As a quarantine was imposed, visits from attorneys, family and others were severely restricted. Detainees' rights to due process were undermined by significant barriers to access of counsel. During the summer of 2019, there was a mumps outbreak at both the Krome Service Processing Center and the Broward Transitional Center. These outbreaks led to long quarantines which prevented attorney visits for several months and prolonged ongoing removal proceedings.

Each passing day raises the level of our concerns amid reports of the spread of COVID-19 throughout our service areas. The governor of Louisiana has declared a state of emergency in that state. On Wednesday, March 11, [the first case](#) of COVID-19 was confirmed in Charlton County, Georgia, near the Folkston ICE Processing Center. As of today, March 13, 2020, [confirmed cases](#) of COVID-19 had grown to 42 in Georgia, 46 in Florida, and 33 in Louisiana. And the numbers continue to grow.

In concert with our colleagues at the American Immigration Lawy

respond appropriately to the crisis. It is essential for the health and well-being of our clients, attorneys, and staff, as well as for ensuring due process throughout legal representation, that we are made aware of ICE's pandemic response efforts immediately.

Above all, given the woeful history of addressing pandemics in ICE detention and the lack of clear planning to address COVID-19, we fear for the health and well-being of our clients in detention. We urge ICE to utilize its inherent discretion to release immigrants to their families and communities while they complete their cases.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Cho
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta
Executive Director

Laura Rivera, Esq.
Southern Poverty Law Center
Director, Southeast Immigrant Freedom Initiative

Jessica Schneider, Esq.
Americans for Immigrant Justice
Director, Detention Program

Azadeh Shahshahani, Esq.
Project South
Legal and Advocacy Director

Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Atlanta reports immigrants confined inside the Folkston and Irwin detention centers.

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