

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 20, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20528
Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

We write to urge you to stay the removals of twenty-eight children and their families detained at the Berks County Residential Center (BCRC) in Leesport, Pennsylvania and at the South Texas Family Residential Center (STFRC) in Dilley, Texas, immediately release them from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody, and allow them the opportunity to present their claim for asylum or related relief.

These families fled unspeakable violence in their home countries. For many of these children, deportation is tantamount to a death sentence. This group of children includes a 15-year-old girl who fled Honduras after gang members tried to torture, rape, and murder her; a 14-year-old boy who fled Guatemala after surviving physical beatings and human trafficking; a three-year-old boy who was ripped from his mother's arms and held captive by gang members who threatened to murder him in El Salvador; a 16-year-old girl who was stripped naked and cut with a knife by gang members in El Salvador; a seven-year-old boy who received death threats in Guatemala due to his indigenous ethnicity; and a four-year-old girl whose father was murdered in Honduras.

After fleeing their homes to seek protection in the United States, many of these families have been subjected to prolonged detention, in some cases for well over a year. Below, we have included excerpts in their own words, but we urge you to read the attached letters from several of the children.

- Katherin, 14-years-old: "I don't have the warmth of family anymore, I feel alone and sad because of everything that has happened in this place. I see so many people who arrive and leave and my mom and I remain here detained. Our lives are also in danger because of so many people who are infected with COVID-19. It hurts me to see that many kids like me are locked up even more because of COVID-19. They spend more time locked up in their rooms. Please, I implore you, I beg you, help us leave this place as soon as possible. I don't want to spend another Christmas locked up here."
- Marjorie, 9-years-old: "In these simple words, [I ask] that you help my mom and me to leave and be able to reunite with my family in Los Angeles California. Please I don't want to spend another Christmas or another birthday in this place without being able to play freely and with the fear of being deported. I ask you to know and understand our suffering, we have been locked up here for so long."

- Jhoselyn, 11-years-old and his sisters Zoe, 8 and Emily, 6: “We have been locked up here for 11 months already, we spent our birthdays here and it’s very hard. We don’t want to spend Christmas locked up here in this center. We can’t play freely or run because the guards yell at us not to. I can’t stand it anymore and I cry a lot... Please, I don’t want them to separate us. My sisters and I can’t go back to Ecuador either.”
- Ashlee, 13-years-old: “I live with my mom and my 5 year old sister Camila, they are all I have... I don’t understand why life isn’t fair. We need to continue our lives as young people, study and be good people for society. Hopefully you will be able to understand and comprehend, or at least imagine how hard it is to be here for so long and they don’t let us leave. May God touch your hearts and have the authority to help us and get us out of here together as one whole family. God bless your lives. What my family and I have lived here I don’t wish on your children nor on any child or young person.”
- Juan David, 11-years-old: “I am detained with my mom. The 27th of this month, we will complete 15 months of detention. They asked me why I am afraid to return to my country. I’m afraid that the gangsters will hurt me, that they will kill me and my mom. That’s why I ask God to soften the hearts of the asylum officers and that I can go live with my aunt and uncle in New York... I want to have a normal life, make friends, go to a normal school, be with my family, living a normal life. Here, I always have a headache and anxiety.”
- Neydi, 10-years-old: “I don’t remember much about my country anymore but when they threatened us a lot my mom brought me to the U.S. so that nothing would happen to me. But now we have been locked up for 14 months in this South Texas jail and I don’t want to be here for another Christmas, in this place where we can’t play freely. Please help me and my mom to leave this place and be able to spend Christmas with my family in North Carolina.”
- Estuardo, 14-years-old: “I have been jailed here for 13 months together with my mom. I hope that whoever this letter reaches is having a good time and in good health, and that you can help us to leave this place as soon as possible because here there have been too many injustices against us. When I came here they told me that the longest I would be here was 20 days but we have now been here for 13 months without a single good answer... I am a calm and humble boy and I have hope in God that I will have the opportunity to stay in this country because we have suffered a lot in Guatemala. We can’t go back...”

Each of the detained children have similar stories to these. They fled violence to seek refuge only to be placed in detention. In the interest of justice, these families should be released from custody, issued Notices to Appear before an immigration court and be given a full and fair opportunity to put forth their case.

With more pressing issues facing ICE and the need to spend our limited federal resources wisely, there are more cost effective and humane approaches to this situation than family detention. We urge you to release these families to their sponsors and allow them a fair hearing of their case. We appreciate your attention in this matter and look forward to a prompt response.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator