

Pennsylvania organizations call for investigation of the deeply disturbing allegations of hysterectomies on immigrant women at the ICE detention center in Georgia

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Today, as organizations that advocate for the wellbeing and human rights of people regardless of immigration status, we condemn the harrowing reports of forced hysterectomies at the Irwin County ICE Detention Center in Georgia. The complaint raised by Project South and the Government Accountability Project on behalf of several brave detained immigrants and longtime licensed practical nurse, Dawn Wooten, on September 14th, 2020, not only raises another red flag on human rights violations occurring inside ICE Detention Centers but also highlights the "jarring medical neglect" throughout the Irwin County Detention Center, particularly about COVID-19 safety protocols and procedures.

“The violation the women endured is a continuation of a long history of state violence against the bodies of Black and Brown people in this country. These practices are unequivocally unacceptable and have no place in our society says 1Hood Power. Lidia Diaz adds “Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and have their bodies respected.”

These heinous human rights abuses need an immediate open investigation by the Office of Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). We join the group of 168 members of Congress that sent a letter on September 15 demanding an urgent response and a briefing on the status of the investigation by September 25. If allegations are true, we urge DHS’s Inspector General, Mr. Joseph V. Cuffari, that doctors, wardens, and custodians of people in ICE custody be held responsible for their actions immediately.

However, these abuses that happen in immigrant detention centers are far from being outliers. Since the pandemic started 6 months ago, hundreds of detained people have tested positive inside ICE detention centers. Despite the growing number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in ICE custody, ICE is continuing business as usual and separating people from their communities and loved ones.

In Pennsylvania, the Berks County Family Detention Center (BCRC) is one of three detention centers for immigrant families, where children as young as two-weeks-old have been incarcerated, and families have been held for more than a year at a time. The Berks detention center is still operating due to the inaction and indifference of Governor Tom Wolf and Berks County Commissioners.

Despite being presented with overwhelming evidence of human rights violations and mistreatment taking place in the detention center, and research outlining his legal power to issue

an Emergency Removal Order that would provide immediate protection to families, Governor Tom Wolf has repeatedly sidestepped responsibility, claiming he has no power to act

We make an urgent call to other organizations to sign onto this joint statement to not only support and protect our immigrant community from these and other atrocities, but also to call for the closing of all immigrant detention centers, including Berks County Family Detention Center. Furthermore, we demand the abolition of ICE, as this is a human rights, reproductive justice, and public health imperative. We know that our immigrant communities are not safe until ICE is shut down. We cannot let this time pass without joining in solidarity to condemn and actively work to change this social injustice that leaves immigrant communities vulnerable and disenfranchised.

Below is a full list of the organizations and or people that have signed on to this joint statement.

Alliance for Refugee Youth Support and Education (ARYSE)
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA)
Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh
Casa San Jose
GirlGov
Global Minds
Global Wordsmiths
Gwen Girls
Labor Council For Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), Pittsburgh Chapter
Latino Community Center
Law Offices of Kristen A. Schneck, LLC
Lawrence Vale United
New Voices
1HoodPower
1Hood Media
Pittsburgh United
Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PINN)
Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition (PICC)
Steel Smiling
Thomas Merton Center
West End Power
Women and Girls Foundation