

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 3, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf  
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security  
301 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

We urge you to immediately grant stays of removal for the 28 children currently held at Pennsylvania's Berks County Residential Center and the South Texas Family Residential Center. We further request humanitarian consideration in releasing those children and their families from Immigration and Customs and Enforcement (ICE) detention and ask that the agency provide a fair opportunity for them to apply for asylum.

As members representing the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, we are particularly concerned about the 2 families who fled Haiti and have been detained at the Berks County Residential Center since March 2020. According to the information provided to our offices, they have never been given the chance to apply for asylum and are quickly exhausting their legal options, putting them at risk of deportation and grave harm.

In total, there are 23 families with children who qualify to seek asylum because of dangerous conditions in their home countries. Many of the 28 children face the prospect of beatings, rape, torture, trafficking, and even death if forced to return to their native countries.

Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered basic access to medical care and legal services. Detained parents who leave the facilities for medical purposes must quarantine for weeks when they return, often away from their children. It would be cruel and unjust to deport these children and their families during the height of a global pandemic crisis. They deserve a fair chance to present their cases in immigration court.

Personal statements from these children describe how difficult it is to live in detention, often separated from their parents and other family members. Some of them have been detained for over a year. We have shared translated quotes below.

Marjorie, who is 9 years old and from El Salvador, writes: *"I have been in this place of detention for 15 months already. With 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."*

Jhoselyn, who is 11 years old, detained with her 2 sisters who are 8 years old and 6 years old respectively, and from Ecuador: *"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. When they told us we could leave for Connecticut I got happy but I cried when they said only without my mom. Please, I don't want them to separate us. My sisters and I can't go back to Ecuador either."*

Father from Haiti detained at Berks County Residential Center: *"We feel like a canoe in the middle of the ocean, without a place to anchor. We fled Haiti due to government violence against us. We were university students speaking out against human rights abuse, injustice. We were attacked, beaten and barely escaped. My wife was pregnant, they raped her and unfortunately lost the baby due to the sexual assault. We were forced to flee our home. First we went to Chile, where racism and xenophobia forced us out again. We came to the US thinking 'this is where we will find refuge', only to be thrown in prison for more than 8 months. It is extremely painful to watch my baby growing up in this jail where I have absolutely no control over his wellbeing. He is often sick and unable to eat but I am forced to watch my baby crying and can't even help him. We are human beings too, our children are human beings too and should have to suffer like that"*

Mother from Haiti detained at Berks County Residential Center: *"When I seek out medical attention, ICE puts us in solitary confinement for 30 days, regardless of getting a negative COVID test. We are now afraid of seeking medical care. I had surgery and after the surgery, in the hospital I felt pain in my ear and a noise inside my head. I tried to explain to the doctors what was happening, but no one seems to know what is happening to me. The noise has not stopped, I cannot eat or sleep and I am afraid of being in solitary confinement again if I ask for medical care."*

Again, we urge you to provide humanitarian consideration in promptly granting stays of removal for these children and releasing them from family detention. These families migrated to escape seriously dangerous conditions and have a right to seek asylum. They deserve a fair and thorough review of their cases. Thank you for your consideration of this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Dwight Evans  
Member of Congress



Mary Gay Scanlon  
Member of Congress



Brian Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress



Chrissy Houlahan  
Member of Congress



Madeleine Dean  
Member of Congress



Brendan F. Boyle  
Member of Congress



Susan Wild  
Member of Congress