

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 24, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2801 Nebraska Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Mr. Wolf,

We write to urge you to immediately halt the needless deportations of immigrants who pose no public safety threat in the United States. COVID-19 cases are now exploding across the country, averaging more than 155,000 cases each day.¹ In this environment, the detention and deportation of immigrants only serves to increase the spread of COVID-19 among detainees and to foreign countries.

To date, COVID-19 has infected more than 55 million people worldwide. The United States has become a hotspot, with more than 12 million cases and more than 250,000 deaths from the disease. With the pace of infection rapidly increasing across the United States, we must take every step possible to stop the spread of COVID-19 domestically and internationally.

Deportations during this outbreak pose a serious risk for the spread of the coronavirus, particularly given that time in detention and grueling travel may weaken immune defenses and exacerbate the risk of infection. Deportation flights to any country during this time endanger passengers and crewmembers. Moreover, they increase the likelihood that the United States may export infections to countries with weak public health infrastructure.

We know that many Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities across the United States have faced COVID-19 outbreaks, putting detainees and ICE officers at increased risk of becoming infected. One of these outbreaks was at the Farmville Detention Center in Virginia, where an overwhelming 75% of those incarcerated tested positive for COVID-19.² We have reports of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) deporting to Guatemala more than two dozen migrants who tested positive for COVID-19.³ Additionally, a recent report by a watchdog group, Witness at the Border, found that there were approximately twelve deportation flights to Haiti in October.⁴ And we are hearing reports from constituents of ICE enforcement activities in East Boston, including increased targeting and deportation of Cape Verdean nationals.

¹ *Covid in the U.S.: Latest Map and Case Count*, N.Y Times (Nov. 17, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html>.

² Priscilla Alvarez, *Nearly 75% of detainees at US immigration facility in Virginia have coronavirus* (July 23, 2020), <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/23/politics/immigration-ice-detention-coronavirus-farmville/index.html>.

³ Juan Montes, *U.S. Fails to Prevent Deportation of Migrants Infected With Covid-19, Guatemalan Officials Say*, Wall St. J. (June 24, 2020), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-fails-to-prevent-deportation-of-migrants-infected-with-covid-19-guatemalan-officials-say-11593023095>.

⁴ Julian Borger, *US Steps up Deportation of Haitians Ahead of Election, Raising Covid Fears*, The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, October 29, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/oct/29/us-steps-up-deportation-haitians-coronavirus>.

ICE enforcement activities terrorize immigrant communities and stop immigrants from seeking critical medical care. As a result, public health officials and medical professionals are unable to provide needed treatment that helps control the outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States.⁵ We urge you to listen medical experts who have called for a stop to deportations as a matter of public health.⁶

In light of the preceding, we respectfully request a written response to the following questions by December 11, 2020.

1. Will ICE halt deportations for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic? If not, why not? Why would ICE continue deportations against the recommendations of medical and public health professionals?
2. Does ICE conduct pre-departure COVID-19 tests on all individuals scheduled for deportation?
 - a. What is the current protocol for dealing with individuals scheduled for deportation who test positive?
3. How many individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 has ICE deported?
 - a. To which countries were these individuals deported?
 - b. Did ICE inform the government of receiving countries the COVID-19 status of these individuals?
4. Does current ICE policy prohibit the deportation of individuals known to have tested positive for COVID-19? If not, why not?
5. What steps is ICE taking to ensure the safety of the passengers and crewmembers on flights with detainees?

Sincerely,



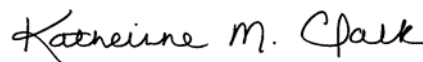
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress



Katherine Clark
Member of Congress

⁵ Miriam Jordan, 'We're Petrified': Immigrants Afraid to Seek Medical Care for Coronavirus, N.Y. Times (May 12, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/18/us/coronavirus-immigrants.html>.

⁶ MSF demands US stop deportations to Latin America and the Caribbean, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (May 4, 2020), <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/news-stories/news/covid-19msf-demands-us-stop-deportations-latin-america-and-caribbean>.



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