

FREE PEOPLE FROM ICE DETENTION LETTER / POSTCARD ACTION GUIDE



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SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE

What's happening: Immigrants and asylum-seekers are locked up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in conditions notorious for overcrowding and inadequate medical care, making them tinderboxes for the spread of COVID-19. Most of these facilities are run or managed by for-profit companies, which have a well-documented record of harsh conditions and negligent care, and lack of accountability.

Black and brown people make up the overwhelming majority of those detained and have long faced added discrimination and other abuses at the hands of ICE. Again and again, they bear the brunt of harsh, punitive enforcement policies and practices anchored in detention and powered by private prison companies.

The U.S. government must reset the immigration detention system – moving away from a punitive system to one based on humanity, compassion, fairness and respect.

Why now? The number of people in immigration detention is historically low, but thousands of people are still unjustly locked up and in danger, especially during a pandemic. This means that calls for freedom and changes to the system are not only feasible but more important than ever.

As people arrive at the southern border seeking safety, political pressure historically leans into detaining them. People who come to the U.S. seeking safety should not be detained but instead safely released into communities with support from community-based programs. The punitive system of unjust detentions must end.

TARGET

While we want to make sure President Joe Biden prioritizes immigration detention

reform in his first 100 days, we are targeting **Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas**: he has the authority as head of the Department of Homeland Security (aka DHS, ICE's parent agency) to implement policy and structural changes to the immigration system that would free people from ICE detention. We also know President Biden is deferring immigration-related matters and decisions to DHS Secretary Mayorkas.

CALL TO ACTION

DHS Secretary Mayorkas must free immigrants and asylum-seekers in the Biden administration's first 100 days. He should take immediate steps to review everyone's case with the presumption of liberty not detention, end family detention, and stop using private prison companies for immigration detention.

We're asking Amnesty activists to send letters, cards, or postcards to DHS Secretary Mayorkas (a la Write for Rights!) to flood his office with hundreds if not thousands of pieces of mail demanding change.

HOW TO TAKE ACTION

Handwritten letters are best for that personal touch, but typed letters are welcome, too! You could also lean into your creativity streak and make DIY cards with drawings, stickers, etc. If you're writing multiple letters or making multiple cards, make sure to enclose each one in its own separate envelope (so if you're writing five letters or cards, you should have five envelopes)!

Local postcards from your city or town illustrate voices across the country and for immigrants and asylum-seekers to be released. If writing a postcard, consider buying some that

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depict landmarks or sites from community i.e., city hall, national park, other tourist attractions, etc.!

Send your letters, cards and postcards to:
The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
US Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

*If cost is a barrier for your participation in this action and you need help with stamps/postage or postcard costs that are over \$10, let us know by [downloading this form](#) and we may be able to reimburse you.

AMPLIFY YOUR CALLS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

We know President Biden, DHS Secretary Mayorkas, and other government officials monitor conversations on social media to gauge the public's interests. We need to make sure they see Amnesty's calls to prioritize freeing people from immigration detention in Biden's first 100 days on their social media feeds.

Elevate these calls and your letter/postcard action on your social media channel to keep our demands on their radar. Take a picture of or with your letter or postcard, highlight our call to action in your post, and make sure to tag @POTUS and @SecMayorkas! Please also use the hashtag #LettersToMayorkas so we can amplify your activism on our main account!

REPORT BACK!

Let us know you took this action here, so we can track how many letters and postcards have gone out to DHS Secretary Mayorkas!

MESSAGING GUIDANCE

Personalized messages in your unique voice are best, so make sure to focus your letter and postcards on why freeing people from immigration detention is important to YOU and your community. But if helpful, we included here some talking points from Amnesty that can help you get started:

It's time to restore our humanity

- The Biden administration must build an immigration system based on humanity, compassion and respect
- Everyone has the right to be treated with dignity, respect, and fairness, no matter their immigration status

No one should be detained solely for seeking safety or because of their immigration status

- The punitive system of unjust detentions must end
- The standard for our immigration system should be freedom, not detention
- Continuing the policy and practice of detaining people simply for seeking safety in this country or solely because of their immigration status is a violation of human rights. It's punitive, harmful, can be deadly, and breaks international law
- The anguish of prolonged and indefinite detention is only amplified by the horrors of inadequate conditions – no one should worry for their lives and their safety in facilities the government forces people into
- No one should lose months and even years of their lives simply for seeking safety or because of their immigration status

There should be a presumption of liberty for an affirmative case review

- The use of

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detention as a default response must cease

- DHS should establish an affirmative file review process to consider release of people in detention, with a presumption of liberty
- This process should prioritize people who are most vulnerable to harm in custody, including individuals who face a heightened risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19, transgender people, pregnant people, HIV+ people, and all families and children
- All persons should be considered eligible for release pursuant to this process, including those subject to statutory mandatory custody
- Such affirmative action is in line with President Biden's stated commitment to racial equity and human rights

There are alternatives to detention, and community support services, including case management programs, that must no longer be an option but the NORM

- There are compassionate alternatives to detention that are efficient, effective, and humane
- We need to invest in true, community-based support services, rather than creating additional forms of detention, such as ankle monitors or surveillance
- Case management programs that help people find legal representation, guide them through the court system, and connect them with other community resources are successful and cheaper by pennies on the dollar. Using These programs recognizes the humanity and dignity of people seeking safety, as well as their families. It ensures people don't get funneled into long-term detention and can be safe and together while they go through the process of seeking safety

Families should be free and together

- Children should never be detained because of their immigration status, and

families should not be separated

- Children should live in freedom with their parents and families as they pursue their right to seek safety. They should be able to grow up with their families, friends and communities
- We must end the policy and practice of family detention

For-profit detention fuels human rights abuses

- Immigration detention centers run by private prison companies have a well-documented record of harsh conditions and negligent care, and lack of accountability
- The U.S. government should move out of the business of using private prison companies for immigration detention. For-profit detention furthers cycles of human rights abuses, making suffering profitable. People seeking safety should no longer be valued by the dollar amount their detention produces
- President Biden should fulfill his campaign pledge to end privatized immigration detention. Just as he has already ordered phasing out contracts for private prisons for the Bureau of Prisons, he should extend that policy to DHS and phase out contracts for private prisons for immigration detention. The U.S. should also end the use of prisons, local jails, and other criminal incarceration facilities for immigration detention
- A handful of corporations should not be responsible for the wellbeing of people seeking safety in this country for years to come. These corporations are responsible to their stakeholders, not the public. We need a system that prioritizes transparency
- If we end for-profit detention, we have the power to finally put a stop to mass detention

White supremacy cannot inform our immigration policies

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- The increasing and punitive use of immigration enforcement has disproportionately affected Black and brown communities, both a reflection and reinforcement of systemic racism and lack of racial equity
- Over the past four years, people seeking safety and immigrants have been subjected to cruel and dehumanizing policies that have unjustly blocked them entering the U.S., locked them up, and deported them. But the origins of these policies long pre-date the Trump administration, as do the foundations of a punitive system.