

URGENT ACTION

SHUT DOWN MIGRANT FAMILY DETENTION CENTER

The South Texas Family Residential Center ("Dilley") in Dilley, Texas, is the only migrant family detention facility in the United States, and it is emblematic of the cruelty of the US migration detention system. Families detained there have reported prolonged incarceration without due process, denial of medical care, and inadequate access to clean drinking water. Infants and children have experienced alarming weight loss, families are frequently separated while detained, and children are denied opportunities for joy and play. Dilley should be shut down immediately, and US authorities must end the detention of migrant children and families once and for all.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Markwayne Mullin
Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security
300 7th St SW, Washington, DC
20024, United States
Email: dhssecretary@hq.dhs.gov

Dear Secretary Mullin,

I am writing to you to express my deep concerns about the children and families that are detained in the South Texas Family Residential Center (Dilley) in Dilley, Texas, and to call on you to immediately shut the facility down. ICE is currently detaining hundreds of parents and children in Dilley, under inhumane conditions:

- Families have been held for weeks on end, in violation of the Flores Settlement Agreement, which sets out minimum standards for the treatment of migrant children in government custody, including limits on the length of time that children can be detained;
- Most families never get to speak with an attorney or appear before a judge before they are deported, and many are sent back to dangerous, life-threatening conditions.
- People with chronic health conditions or medical emergencies have been denied the care they need and infants and children are experiencing alarming weight loss;
- Families have been denied access to adequate clean drinking water, forced in many cases to drink tap water that is foul-smelling and known to cause upset stomachs;
- Children frequently are not allowed access to educational opportunities or even crayons to play with;

The detention of children – for any amount of time – has profound and lifelong consequences that last well beyond the time they are detained. This is why migration detention of children is unlawful under international law. It is unacceptable that the US government is spending billions of dollars on terrorizing communities, separating families, and otherwise committing human rights abuses, including locking up parents and children in unsafe and unsanitary conditions. The Dilley detention facility is cruel, dangerous, and deeply inhumane. I demand you **put a stop to the widespread abuse and neglect that children and adults are experiencing in ICE custody: shut down Dilley right away and release all those detailed there.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Family detention is a key part of the mass detention and deportation system in the United States, used as a tool to expand immigration enforcement. The issue reflects a systemic detention regime affecting more than 6,200 children, toddlers, and newborn babies. Family detention is not being used as an exceptional safeguard but as a routine policy practice. Families are being held for prolonged periods, often for months, in violation of the 20-day limit set under the *Flores* Settlement Agreement.

Serious due process concerns are present throughout the system. Access to legal counsel is limited, and in some cases effectively unavailable. Individuals are frequently not given clear or timely information about immigration procedures or their rights. Deportations are reported to occur without a meaningful opportunity to pursue legal claims, raising concerns under the principles of due process and of non-refoulement.

A central feature of the system is the use of coercion through family separation. There are documented examples of a five-year-old child threatened with removal from their family, a teenager pressured to abandon their claim under threat of separation upon turning 18, and a breastfeeding mother separated from her United States citizen baby for more than 100 days. These situations illustrate the use of fear and separation as a method of enforcement rather than isolated incidents.

Conditions within detention facilities are widely reported as inhumane and degrading. Individuals face inadequate access to food, clean water, hygiene supplies, and basic care. These conditions are particularly harmful for children and can interfere with their physical development and well-being. In some cases, the severity of conditions may amount to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The harm extends beyond immediate conditions to serious physical and psychological impacts. People in detention experience deterioration in both mental and physical health, with children facing significant risks of long-term trauma. Medical care is often disrupted, including for individuals with ongoing or chronic health needs.

High-risk groups are disproportionately affected. Pregnant individuals often lack adequate prenatal care. Infants and children are held in environments that are not suitable for their developmental needs. Family separation contributes to severe emotional distress and can result in lasting developmental harm. The situation is not the result of isolated failures but reflects the structure of the family detention model itself.

The migration-related detention of children is strictly prohibited in international law as it can never be in their best interests. There is no rights respecting way to detain children and families at scale. Community based alternatives exist for those that need them and are more effective while avoiding the harms associated with detention. Family detention inflicts profound and enduring harm that continues long after release.

Immigration detention is only allowed in the most exceptional of circumstances. The enjoyment of personal liberty must remain any individual's default condition. Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, like anyone else, must benefit from a legal presumption of liberty. As a consequence, if they are subject to any deprivation of liberty, it must be clearly prescribed by law and strictly justified by a legitimate purpose that is necessary, proportionate, and non-discriminatory.

States have an obligation to ensure that conditions of detention meet international human rights law and standards, notably that the conditions of detention are humane and the human rights of detained individuals are respected. This includes protection against torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; access to medical care; exercise; and the ability to communicate with the outside world including consulates, attorneys, and family. ICE also has Family Residential Standards which dictate the operation of facilities housing families detained for immigration-related reasons, and which require access to legal resources, family unity, clean and secure detention conditions, education, recreation time, nutritionally-balanced meals, and medical care.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 15 November 2026

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Families Detained in Dilley (they/them)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: n/a