

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 29, 2020

Ms. Christi Grimm  
Principal Deputy Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
330 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Joseph V. Cuffari  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
245 Murray Lane SW  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Principal Deputy Inspector General Grimm and Inspector General Cuffari:

We respectfully request that you immediately investigate urgent public health concerns for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainees and facility staff at the Pulaski County Detention Center in Ullin, Illinois. In light of the time sensitivity, we ask that you respond to this request with your findings and recommendations as soon as possible, and no later than next Friday, June 5.

We have received information indicating that this remote detention facility lacks the physical layout for necessary social distancing and has seen a rapid spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) among detainees, some of whom have preexisting conditions causing increased risks from the disease. ICE's decision to continue to transfer detainees to this facility during the pandemic raises significant public health concerns. We have grave concerns that ICE is unnecessarily putting detainees, staff and the local community at risk. We are particularly troubled by the potential strain that an outbreak could place on limited local health resources in this rural community.

As of May 28, 2020, ICE reported that 29 detainees in ICE custody at the Pulaski County facility, more than one third of the facility's ICE detainees, have tested positive for COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> Multiple staff members at the facility have also tested positive for COVID-19. Local news reporting has highlighted detainees who fear for their lives, and Ullin Mayor Mike DeWitt, along with other community members, has expressed serious concerns about ICE's decision to continue transferring detainees to this remote detention center in the midst of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ice.gov/coronavirus>, updated May 28, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Officials tight-lipped on Pulaski County Detention Center outbreak as detainees fear for their lives, April 25, 2020, [https://thesouthern.com/news/local/officials-tight-lipped-on-pulaski-county-detention-center-outbreak-as-detainees-fear-for-their-lives/article\\_b1805d49-6d56-53c6-a650-229ed70aed4f.html](https://thesouthern.com/news/local/officials-tight-lipped-on-pulaski-county-detention-center-outbreak-as-detainees-fear-for-their-lives/article_b1805d49-6d56-53c6-a650-229ed70aed4f.html) (“Mike DeWitt, Ullin mayor, said he is frustrated that ICE transferred detainees to the detention center in his remote Pulaski County village in the midst of the coronavirus outbreak. . . ‘Somebody needs to be held accountable. Someone dropped the ball allowing the inmates to come in there,’ DeWitt said. ‘We didn’t have any cases in Pulaski County and now we’ve got this. Ullin is an older community — they can’t afford to get it.’”).

According to information provided to us by the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC), a nonprofit organization representing individuals in detention at the Pulaski County facility,<sup>3</sup> multiple ICE detainees at the facility have preexisting medical issues that place them at higher risk of infection and complications from COVID-19, but ICE has not provided adequate medical care to these detainees. NIJC also reports that ICE has released detainees who subsequently tested positive for COVID-19 without first testing them for the disease or arranging for their safe transport from this remote facility, which ICE has customarily provided from this facility. For example, ICE reportedly released a detainee with liver failure, without first testing him for COVID-19, outside the gate of the facility without any transportation or assistance. A community volunteer picked up the detainee to ensure he could attend his next dialysis appointment in Chicago. At this appointment, he tested positive for COVID-19. By then his volunteer driver, and possibly others, had been needlessly exposed to the virus.

Protecting public safety is key to the mission of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, and safeguarding public health is a policy priority for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General. In light of the concerns outlined in this letter, we urge you to immediately investigate ICE's use of this facility during the pandemic, including its record of releasing vulnerable detainees. As part of this investigation, we request that in addition to communicating with relevant federal agency officials you consult with local health authorities, detainees and staff at the facility, and legal service providers serving detainees.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



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Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator

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<sup>3</sup> National Immigrant Justice Center, The Pulaski County Detention Center – Ullin, Illinois: Rapid COVID-19 Spread Endangers Lives, May 27, 2020.