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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

April 8, 2020

The Honorable Tom Wolf, Governor
Office of Governor
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf,

As we continue to confront the ongoing outbreak of COVID-19, it is imperative that we focus on the most vulnerable among us. I applaud your leadership in securing and directing resources to health service providers, small businesses, and community organizations across the Commonwealth to respond to this crisis, understanding that these efforts will – and must – continue.

That said, I would like to bring to your attention one population that has continuously been forgotten by our society and, as a result, is at significant risk during this crisis: immigrants held in civil immigration detention centers across Pennsylvania.

The individuals and families held at these facilities, operated under the authority of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in some cases have not entered the country illegally, nor do they necessarily have a criminal record. Nonetheless, they are confined awaiting judgements regarding their immigration status indefinitely. While this speaks to a larger policy issue and debate, I implore you to consider the conditions that these individuals are being held under in light of the current outbreak of COVID-19 and Pennsylvania's role in their confinement.

A *Washington Post* article from just yesterday titled, “‘It’s a time bomb’: ICE detainees seek release amid growing coronavirus fears”, details the dire situation at these facilities saying, “Crowded facilities make social distancing impossible as detainees sleep in dormitories with dozens of others. Bunk beds are arranged in clusters. Bathrooms are shared. Hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes have been hard to find, according to several detainees, lawyers and advocates. Opportunities to shower or wash hands are limited.” The article goes on to discuss recent judicial actions to release

individuals and families held at these facilities, along with hunger strikes at several facilities – including the York County Prison.

I implore you to be a leader with this issue, as you have with so many others as our Commonwealth and nation respond to the outbreak of COVID-19. Our top priority must be to save lives, and our actions to protect the most vulnerable among us should remain steadfast to that commitment.

To that end, I ask that you immediately direct the Department of Human Services to issue an Emergency Removal Order for the Berks County Family Detention Center. Further, I request that you direct county and state facilities holding individuals in civil immigration detention to immediately release these individuals to protect their health and safety.

I thank you for your time and consideration of this important request, as we continue to respond to this unprecedented public health crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angel Cruz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Angel Cruz

Democratic Chairman

House Human Services Committee