Today the Santa Fe Dreamers Project (SFDP), along with 13 other LGBTQ, civil rights and immigration justice organizations, submitted a complaint on behalf of current and formerly detained lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals and people living with HIV (LGBTQ, PLWHIV) against CoreCivic, GEO Group, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), holding them responsible for jeopardizing their health, safety, and lives while in immigration detention.

SFDP’s Director of Litigation & Release, Wesley Brockway, who is responsible for the legal programming provided to the transgender and gender non-conforming asylum-seekers detained at the Cibola County Correctional Center reports that “travel to the United States is extremely dangerous and unkind for LGBTQ migrants, but unfortunately it is one of the few options they have. When they arrive at the United States-Mexico border, they are imprisoned by the U.S. government despite their requests for refuge from the countries they are fleeing. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is fully aware of the verbal, sexual and physical violence, medical negligence, inhumane housing conditions, and overuse of solitary confinement in both public and private detention centers that disproportionately affects LGBTQ individuals’ and people living with HIV. Inexcusably, DHS and its for-profit subsidiaries continue to operate with impunity. Because of this, we cannot trust private prison companies, ICE, or CBP with caring for especially vulnerable people. We must call for the immediate release of all LGBTQ migrants and people living with HIV.”

SFDP’s Post-Release Coordinator, Alma Rosa Silva Banuelos, who regularly tracks detention conditions and medical treatment provided to those detained at Cibola states, “In recent reports from transgender asylum seekers formerly and currently detained, the medical conditions continue to decline and are getting worse. The medical requests made by transgender detainees are often ignored entirely or must be submitted multiple time before they are given any medical attention. In some cases, when transgender individuals do finally receive medical attention, it is inadequate and does not address the specific health the individual is facing. It has also been brought to our attention that in some privately owned facilities, transgender asylum seekers are being imprisoned with the general male population, putting them at high-risk of being physically or sexually harmed.”

An Office of the Inspector General (OIG) report looking at 2018 and 2019 inspection reviews of ICE immigrant prisons concluded that ICE’s monitoring systems do not ensure adequate oversight or systematic improvements in prison conditions. These immigrant prisons continue to operate with these
problems remaining unaddressed for years. Further, the OIG found that **ICE did not hold private prison contractors accountable for not meeting performance standards**, meaning that they continued to receive contracts and make a profit while people were forced to live in inhumane conditions.

The testimonies featured in the complaint shed light on the poor oversight and lack of accountability seen at eight immigrant prisons: Cibola County Correctional Center in Milan, New Mexico, Adelanto Detention Facility in Adelanto, California, Otay Mesa Detention Center in San Diego, California, Irwin County Detention Center in Ocilla, Georgia, South Texas Detention Facility in Pearsall, Texas, Aurora Detention Facility in Aurora, Colorado, Hudson County Correctional Facility in Kearny, New Jersey, and Krome Service Processing Center in Miami, Florida. Most of these immigrant prisons are privately operated by either CoreCivic, the GEO Group, or LaSalle Corrections. The testimonies date back as far as 2014 and some detail experiences that have happened as recently as this year.

**Testimony Highlighting Conditions at the Cibola County Correction Center (CoreCivic)**

D., is a stateless transgender woman first detained in the Cibola County Correction Center in April 2017; she remained in ICE custody for close to two years. D.’s medical records indicated a fragile psychological state, which included a history of suicide attempts. She had a history of physical and sexual abuse that has resulted in significant trauma. She had previously been prescribed medication for PTSD, depression, and anxiety at various times in her adult life. Nonetheless, she was placed in solitary confinement for a prolonged period of time. Substantially distressed by her confinement, D. requested to see a mental health provider—stating that she was extremely depressed and anxious and needed to speak to a mental health professional. D. was denied access to counsel and treatment. Because the thought of being held in solitary confinement indefinitely was too much for her to bear, D. attempted to hang herself in her cell using a belt. Afterwards, D. was still denied access to phone lines in order to contact her legal representatives. She remained in ICE custody for an additional nine consecutive months following this incident, resulting in significant and long-lasting psychological and emotional decompensation.

A. is a transgender woman from El Salvador who was detained in Cibola County Detention Center for over 20 months. A.’s medical records indicate she suffered from advanced syphilis and, according to a pro bono medical evaluation, her medical records indicate that her condition has progressed to neurosyphilis, increasingly affecting her cognitive abilities. Despite this evidence and her counsel’s advocacy, ICE has continuously failed to provide her penicillin, a well-known and easily accessible medication. Until recently, ICE also had repeatedly refused to release A. from detention so she could get the medical treatment she required.

#LGBTQMigrantsSPEAK