

April 20, 2022

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, DC 20528

Re: PETITION Requesting the Administration to Abstain from Renewing Contract with Glades County (Florida) with a Performance Period End Date of April 30, 2022.

Dear Secretary Mayorkas,

The undersigned Florida and national organizations who represent the Shut Down Glades Coalition write to urge you to abstain from renewing the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) contract with Glades County, as the Glades County Detention Center (“Glades”) located in Moore Haven, Florida has demonstrated a long history of pervasive and persistent abuse of the immigrant population that reaches the level of inhumane and degrading treatment. The abuses against individuals detained at Glades warranted closure of this facility years ago, and now, with the current ICE population at zero and the performance period for the Intergovernmental Service Agreement (“IGSA”) between ICE and Glades County coming to an end on April 30, 2022, DHS can and should prevent further abuse of individuals at this detention center by permanently terminating the IGSA.

The Glades County Sheriff's Office, which operates Glades County Detention Center, has repeatedly evaded oversight and ignored ICE's own directions, demonstrating time and again that the detention center is beyond reform. We are concerned that the administration has decided to pause the facility’s usage until a future, undetermined date, instead of abstaining from renewing the Glades contract altogether. While we are relieved to see that the administration has stopped placing individuals in ICE custody at Glades for the time being. ICE and Glades County have consistently demonstrated that they are unwilling and unable to appropriately mitigate and respond to the harm suffered by those in their care. Our organizations have filed at least 77 complaints to the DHS Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (“CRCL”), the Office of Inspector General, and other oversight bodies requesting investigation of abuses at Glades since 2017, but the detention center continues to “pass” questionable inspections, including most recently in February 2022. While the CRCL complaints highlight the abuse suffered by roughly 140 individuals, the true extent of the harm is much broader. These complaints represent only the individuals who found the courage, resources, and allies to file the complaints.

The documents attached provide support for our claims and demonstrate why Glades needs to close completely, which you can do by abstaining to renew the contract with Glades County:

- Petition signed by more than 1592 individuals calling for the closure of the facility out of concern about the pervasive medical neglect, unlawful use of toxic chemicals, racialized violence, inhumane treatment, physical abuse, sexual misconduct, and attacks on individuals’ dignity and safety that occur regularly at the Glades facility.
- Memo sent to DHS in November 2021 citing the systemic and consistent pattern of racism and anti-Blackness towards Black immigrants at Glades. The treatment of Black immigrants at Glades includes, but is not limited to, disproportionate: threats of physical violence, use of pepper spray, solitary confinement, extreme forms of physical violence like using the restraint chair, off-camera physical assault, and punitive, arbitrary administrative sanctions. Black immigrants at Glades are also subject to anti-immigrant verbal abuse that is often tied to their nationality.
- Letter from 17 members of Congress to DHS on February 1, 2022 calling for the facility’s closure.
- Letter from eight members of Congress to DHS on July 22, 2021 calling for the facility’s closure.
- Large multi-individual complaint from February 2021 citing reckless endangerment of the lives of those detained at Glades during the Covid-19 pandemic, including medical abuse, lack of PPE and hygiene products, haphazard transfers, exposing healthy people to the virus through the practice of cohorting, retaliation for peaceful protest, use of toxic chemicals in confined spaces, hospitalizations, deaths, disappearances, and other serious abuses.
- Multi-individual complaint submitted August 2021 on behalf of seven immigrant women, citing hostile, unsanitary, and unsafe living conditions including sexual voyeurism by male guards; unannounced entries in violation of privacy and Prison Rape Elimination Acts (“PREA”) abuse prevention policies; sexually abusive behavior from medical staff; racist verbal abuse; violent and threatening interactions; and, hygiene products withheld abusively.
- Letter submitted December 2021 detailing a carbon monoxide buildup that resulted in the poisoning of nine people who were working in the kitchen at Glades: six detained individuals and three Glades staff members. Of these, four detained men and one female Glades staff member were hospitalized at Hendry Regional Medical Center, and two of the hospitalized men subsequently had to be airlifted from Hendry Regional Medical Center to AdventHealth hospital in Orlando because exposure to the gas caused such dire symptoms.

Through the submission of the complaints and letters identified above and other lawsuits¹, ICE and various oversight bodies have been aware of the long-standing pattern of abuses at Glades

¹ See *Gayle v. Meade*, 2020 WL 2203576 (S.D. Fla. May 2, 2020); *St. Louis v. Martin*, 2020 WL 3490179, at *1 (M.D. Fla. June 26, 2020).

for years, and yet multiple investigations and inspections have failed to permanently put a stop to the inhumane treatment at this facility. Based on this pattern, our coalition does not have confidence in the oversight process. We are not alone. The Committee on Homeland Security expressed the same concerns, explaining that “[DHS’s] oversight tools have few enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with law and policy. The enforcement mechanisms that do exist, such as canceling contracts or issuing financial penalties, are seldom used.”² While this coalition is relieved that the use of Glades as an ICE facility is “paused,” Glades has proven time and again that it cannot be reformed. More inspections and investigations by oversight bodies without enforcement authority will not ensure that immigrants are no longer harmed at Glades. The only thing that can achieve that goal is a decision by DHS to permanently end any contractual relationship with Glades County.

We are also concerned that Glades will simply be quietly repopulated in a matter of weeks or months based on similar occurrences across the country. For example, at the Yuba County Detention Center in California, the ICE population was decreased to zero in October 2021, following multiple complaints from detained individuals, advocates, and 24 congressional representatives who called for closure, only to be repopulated two months later without any internal changes or formal announcement made to community stakeholders and political representatives.

The Biden Administration must ensure that immigrants will no longer be harmed at the Glades County Detention Center by abstaining from renewing the IGSA with Glades County and terminating the relationship altogether.

Not only is the termination of the IGSA the only way the Biden Administration and DHS can prevent further harm, it is also the only just option in pursuing the agency’s goal of creating a more fair, just, and efficient immigration system. Thank you for your attention to this critical and urgent matter.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union of Florida
Americans for Immigrant Justice
Detention Watch Network
Doctors for Camp Closure
American Friends Service Committee Florida
Freedom for Immigrants

² See ICE Detention Facilities Failing to Meet Basic Standards of Care, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, Majority Staff Report, September 21, 2020, <https://homeland.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Homeland%20ICE%20facility%20staff%20report.pdf>, last accessed April 18, 2022.

Immigrant Action Alliance
Southern Poverty Law Center
Florida Immigrant Coalition
Legal Aid Service of Broward County
Detention Kills
Black Lives Matter Palm Beach County
Community Hotline for Incarcerated People
Food Not Bombs Lake Worth
The Grey Tea Kettle Chaplaincy Community Care & Support
The Farm Worker Association of Florida
University of Miami School of Law Immigration Clinic
United We Dream
Human Rights Defense Center and QLatinx

Cc:

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