Press Statement

In Response to News of COVID-19 Outbreak in Otero ICE Facility, Las Americas Calls for Release of Detained Migrants, Coordination with Local Communities

ICE Must Take Responsibility For the Results of Their Actions and Inactions in COVID-19 Crisis

Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center is gravely concerned to learn today of two COVID-19 cases at the Otero County Processing Center, one among facility staff and one of a detained migrant. Our thoughts are with those infected and their families.

Obviously this is a troubling situation which can escalate quickly in ways that will put detained persons, facility staff, and surrounding communities at risk. ICE and management at Otero have a responsibility to take immediate steps to secure the safety and wellbeing of all of these persons. There needs to be immediate testing to understand the size of the outbreak at Otero, and the immediate, orderly release on humanitarian parole of detained persons to ensure that they are not put needlessly at risk. Moreover, there needs to be immediate and sustained engagement on the part of ICE and Otero management with surrounding local governments, public health agencies, and other stakeholders to develop a comprehensive strategy to minimize this outbreak.

In many ways, this news confirms our worst fears. ICE’s continued insistence on mass detention during a pandemic is putting the safety of Americans at needless risk. Utterly baffling and inappropriate actions by the Trump Administration, like the continued transfer of individuals between ICE facilities, have worked counterproductively to facilitate the spread of COVID-19. And a shortsighted refusal to come to the table leaves our families and communities in the dark about how we can best manage this crisis and protect public health. This news was a predictable outcome of these choices, a fact that makes it no more acceptable.

ICE has a responsibility to protect the wellbeing of people in the Borderland, of the migrants in their custody, and of their staff, which they have ignored in the face of COVID-19. They have failed to implement and follow CDC guidelines. We must hold them accountable for the human cost of their actions and inactions in the face of this crisis. And we must prepare for the toll their irresponsibility will take on the lives of immigrants, their own employees, and our communities.

Notably, this news comes after dozens of local and national organizations, elected officials, and other community leaders have come together to call on ICE to release detained migrants, and coordinate with local stakeholders in the face of COVID-19. Las Americas spearheaded a letter to Borderland area public health agencies that went out last week, and held a virtual press conference to follow up on our call for release this past Tuesday. Likewise, Las Americas will work with lawmakers to ensure that there is active, robust, and independent ongoing oversight of this situation. We are grateful for the vision and moral leadership of this community and we will continue to work for the release of detained migrants as this pandemic rages through our region.