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SB 850 - SUPPORT
CORRECTIONAL SERVICES - IMMIGRATION DETENTION -
PROHIBITION (DIGNITY NOT DETENTION ACT)

Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 26, 2020

Dear Chair Smith and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

La ColectiVA, an inclusive collaborative committed to upholding social justice and equity, introduces this statement of support for SB 850 (Dignity Not Detention Act). We believe in the principles of inclusivity, consciousness, dignity and justice. We practice grassroots work that is centered in the community and stand against anything that oppresses people, including the criminalization, incarceration, and deportation of migrants.

Through the experiences of our organization's members and community members who have experienced the impact of detention directly, we have learned of the harm detention, and in particular Immigration Centers of America (ICA), exerts on our loved ones.

We believe that preventing the expansion of public and private immigration detention, especially considering the particularly exploitative nature of private prison companies, is critical for supporting migrants and all our neighbors. Agreements like the ones private prison companies like Immigration Centers of America (ICA) employs in Virginia have set up mechanisms to guarantee hundreds of people will be incarcerated daily at a moral, human, and fiscal cost to residents of Farmville and Virginia as a whole. La ColectiVA and the community members we work with believe it is important we oppose expansion of these mechanisms, and instead use public resources to invest in education, housing, healthcare and other urgent needs.

An account from a local community member who has been detained at ICA-Farmville, shares the following:

“In my time in detention, I experienced mistreatment and difficult conditions, including isolation, bad medical care, and racism from some of the guards. I would never want to be back in detention nor would I want another of those detention centers to be opened. I was there for over a year and I am still unable to overcome the effect this had on me and my family.

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I learned that the owners of the facility gained profit from having us incarcerated and I consistently saw many people who had already signed off on their deportation, continue to be detained for indefinite amounts of time. I witnessed the way the people detaining us took measures to increase the amount of money left for them by cutting costs in care for people. In one instance, someone who fainted during recreational time was only given Tylenol as a response. Food was insufficient for people and we were only given chicken as a food option twice a week, leaving us hungry and relying on expensive commissary to survive. I lost a lot of weight while in detention and my family and community support spent a lot of money to help me out. Additionally, I saw abuse through the use of isolation in detention. I heard people who were subjected to isolation most of the time they were detained and the way they yelled and suffered. It makes me sad to think of how we had to endure harsh treatment to not aggravate our situation.”

This is only one example of thousands of people who experience incarceration and harsh treatment daily at the hands of ICE and their contractors. We are committed to supporting efforts to prevent the expansion of these practices.

We urge a favorable report on SB 850.