

September 24, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Kenneth Cuccinelli
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Department of Homeland Security
20 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20529

The Honorable Joseph V. Cuffari
Inspector General
Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, S.W. Washington, D.C. 20528-0305

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf, Senior Official Cuccinelli, and Inspector Cuffari,

The undersigned disability organizations, in solidarity with immigrant and reproductive health rights and justice organizations, write to express our unified outrage at the [recent report on the alarming rate of non-consensual](#) hysterectomies performed on immigrant women in custody of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at the Irwin County Detention Center in Georgia. We are appalled by the fundamental human rights violations these women have endured and see ICE's actions at the Irwin County Detention Center as part of a long racist, sexist, and ableist history in this country.

We demand that the Trump Administration immediately halt the practice of non-consensual hysterectomies and any other non-consensual procedures in ICE detention centers. We are grateful that the Department of Homeland Security has already launched investigations into the Irwin County Detention Center in Georgia. We urge that these investigations be both thorough and transparent. We also call for similar investigations in all other ICE detention centers. As this horrific incidence shows, Irwin County Detention Center must be closed, as must all ICE detention centers. We further call for ICE to halt any contemplated deportations of people who have undergone these or similar procedures until investigations into these issues can be completed. Finally, we call upon the Administration to immediately rescind the Public Charge Rule, and all ableist, racist, and eugenic immigration policies. Until then, Congress should #DefundHate and refuse to fund further ICE activity.

While this news is horrific, it is not surprising given the long and sordid history of forced sterilizations in the United States. At the beginning of our nation, Black women were [sterilized](#) to control the population of enslaved Africans. More recently, the [Family Planning Services and](#)

[Population Research Act](#) of 1970 made it possible for physicians associated with the Indian Health Service to sterilize an estimated 25% of Native American Women of child-bearing age. Between the 1920s and the 1950s California initiated an [aggressive forced sterilization](#) program that targeted Mexican immigrant and Mexican-American women. In yet another example, as many as 70,000 Americans were forcibly sterilized during the 20th century due to the [Buck v. Bell Supreme Court decision](#) of 1927, a decision which continues to make forced sterilization of disabled people completely legal today, often in the form of [guardian-imposed sterilization](#). These are just a few of the all too numerous examples of eugenic practices in the history of the United States, devaluing our bodies, lives, and futures as women, people of color, immigrants, and disabled people.

It is important to point out that these non-consensual sterilizations are happening in the context of the widespread medical neglect and unsanitary and unsafe conditions endemic to immigrant detention — conditions made even more dangerous by the [threat of COVID-19](#), which spreads rapidly through congregate settings. Just this spring, Cameroonian women detained at an ICE detention center in Louisiana conducted a [hunger strike](#), protesting medical neglect by the facility staff.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that non-consensual and unnecessary sterilizations have only taken place at the Irwin County Detention Center. We know of these 5 women who received non-consensual hysterectomies at ICDC because Dawn Wooten spoke up, but there may be many similar cases in other detention centers that we will never know about. Most of the people currently held in immigration detention do not have a lawyer, lack language access services, and may not have any avenue for sharing their experiences and seeking justice. Nonetheless, advocates are already seeing similar stories come to light at other immigration detention facilities.

This is not a matter of one bad doctor — this is precisely the pattern of abuse to be expected from our inhumane immigration detention system, reflecting the same eugenic practices, dehumanization, and familiar structures of violence we see in institutionalization and mass incarceration. These horrific acts are a violation of fundamental human rights, and they are also the inevitable outcomes of an immigration system that perpetuates human rights abuses, medical abuse and neglect, sexual assault, and mass incarceration. The system cannot be fixed. It must be dismantled.

Sincerely,

American Association of People with Disabilities
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Hispanic Federation
National Women's Law Center

In Solidarity:

Access Living
Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
Barth Syndrome Foundation
CAC Trailblazers
Center for Public Representation
Chicagoland Autism Connection Trailblazers
Coalition for Immigrant Mental Health - Illinois
Creating Connections PC
Dia de la Mujer Latina
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF)
Genetic Alliance
IMPACT CIL
Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants
Latino Caucus for Public Health- APHA
Little People of America
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
Mucopolipidosis Type IV Foundation
National Alliance for Hispanic Health
National Association of the Deaf
National Council on Independent Living
National Infusion Center Association (NICA)
Nikkei Uprising
Not Dead Yet
Phelan-McDermid Syndrome Foundation
Progress Center for Independent Living
PXE International
Senior and Disability Action
SILC of Illinois
The Advocacy Institute
The Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy and Innovation
The HANA Center
United Spinal Association
University of Florida; Academics for Black Survival and Wellness
University YMCA - New American Welcome Center
Ventura County Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE-VC)