October 4, 2022

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Joseph V. Cuffari  
Inspector General  
Office of Inspector General  
Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528-0305

Re: Status of Investigations into September 2020 Disclosures of Whistleblower Dawn Wooten and Immigrant Women Detained at Irwin County Detention Center

Dear Inspector General Cuffari,

The Government Accountability Project and Project South, along with the 73 undersigned organizations, seek a status report on the ongoing investigations by your office into the whistleblower disclosures and retaliation complaint of nurse Dawn Wooten, along with the complaints of multiple women detained in ICE custody at the Irwin County Detention Center (ICDC), submitted to your office in September 2020. This month marks two years since these women disclosed health and safety violations at ICDC, including failures to protect workers and immigrants from COVID-19 as well as nonconsensual invasive gynecological procedures performed on detained women.

The importance of the complaints Ms. Wooten and the women detained at ICDC made regarding conditions at the facility cannot be understated. Following their critical reports of severe abuses,

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3 The story of the public disclosures of Ms. Wooten and the complaints of the detained women went viral and prompted intense Congressional inquiry. See e.g., House Committee on Oversight and Reform, Press Release, Chairs Thompson and Maloney Announce Subpoena Regarding Allegations of Mistreatment at Irwin County
DHS Secretary Mayorkas in May 2021 ordered Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to sever its contract with ICDC, stating “We will not tolerate the mistreatment of individuals in civil immigration detention or substandard conditions of detention.”\(^4\) By the first anniversary of their disclosures, no noncitizens in ICE custody were detained at the facility.

We acknowledge that your office has taken important investigative action regarding some parts of Ms. Wooten’s disclosures, namely, concerns of inappropriate medical care and inadequate response to the COVID-19 pandemic at the facility. The subsequent report issued January 3, 2022 validated Ms. Wooten’s concerns that ICDC and ICE management fell short in their COVID-19 safety guidance.\(^5\)

However, two years after initial disclosures, at least two DHS OIG investigations remain open: an investigation into the approval process for gynecological procedures at ICDC referred to the OIG Office of Investigations, and an audit focusing on how surgical procedures are authorized and approved for detained immigrants across all ICE detention facilities.\(^6\) In addition, two other reports on the violations at Irwin County Detention Center have been released which raise even more questions and point to the urgency of this matter.

On June 3, 2021, Project South along with National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild, and Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, released a report titled, “Deliberate Indifference: Records show ICE’s systemic failures at Georgia detention facility at the center of gynecological abuse investigations.”\(^7\) This report summarizes documents received through FOIA requests. Findings include:

- **An outside gynecologist billed ICE for at least 71 invasive procedures from 2015 to 2020.** The doctor also submitted bills for 71 other invasive procedures, such as dilation and curettage and laparoscopy, and for 448 office visits by detained immigrants over five years.

- **Violations of ICE detention standards for medical care and vetting medical providers.** Inspection reports found numerous violations of ICE detention standards and other deficiencies, including an inability to "validate if peer reviews" by an "external state physician" had been completed for "independently licensed medical professionals" providing care to people detained at ICDC.

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\(^6\) Id. At 6.

• Recurring deficiencies relating to healthcare, detention conditions, and mistreatment of people detained at the facility, including the lack of medical and mental healthcare, unsanitary conditions, lack of prenatal care for women and the aggressive use of solitary confinement in violation of ICE detention standards.

• A history of complaints lodged with ICE by the Mexican Consulate and advocates, with claims of abuse and neglect at ICDC going back as far as 2018.

On September 16, 2021, Project South, Georgia Detention Watch, Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights and South Georgia Immigrant Support Network released an extensive report with Harbor Immigration and Refugee Clinic and Harbor Law School Immigration Project titled, “Violence and Violation: Medical Abuse of Immigrants Detained at Irwin County Detention Center.”8 This report features firsthand testimonies from 14 immigrant women formerly detained at ICDC who underwent gynecological procedures without their full knowledge and consent.

Immigrant women who bravely came forward with the abuse they faced, detailed and supported by records obtained through FOIA and public reporting, are still waiting for answers and accountability. Equally concerning is that the investigation into Ms. Wooten’s whistleblower retaliation complaint has not been completed despite multiple extensions granted to your office beyond the 180-day statutory deadline for issuance of findings. In the absence of a resolution, Ms. Wooten continues to face explicit blocklisting and has paid an enormous economic, psychological, and emotional toll for her courage to alert oversight agencies like your office, Congress, and the public to the harms occurring at ICDC.9

Without the disclosures of Ms. Wooten and the immigrant women who shared their horrific experiences, the abuses your office is investigating might have continued unabated. Given the importance of the complaints and the time that has passed, we ask that you provide a status report or issue final reports in the pending investigations.

Sincerely,

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Cc: House Speaker Nancy Pelosi
    Representative Pramila Jayapal
    Representative Jerrold Nadler
    Representative Zoe Lofgren
    Representative Judith Chu
    Representative Jamie Raskin
    Representative Bennie Thompson
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    Representative Sylvia Garcia
    Representative Raul Ruiz
    Senator Jon Ossoff
    Senator Raphael Warnock
    Congressional Hispanic Caucus
    U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor
    U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security
    U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary
    U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform
    U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
Organizational Endorsers

African Human Rights Coalition
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta
Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)
Bridges Faith Initiative
CAIR Georgia
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Center for Victims of Torture Georgia
Centro Legal de la Raza
Church World Service
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Cobb Immigrant Alliance
Columbia Law School Immigrants' Rights Clinic
Community Asylum Seekers Project
Disability Rights Advocates
Dorothy Day Catholic Worker, Washington DC
El Refugio Ministry
Envision Freedom Fund
Equal Rights Advocates
Equity Forward
Families For Freedom
Fellowship Southwest / Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Franciscan Action Network
Free Government Information (FGI)
Freedom BLOC
Freedom Network USA
Georgia Human Rights Clinic
Georgia Interfaith Public Policy Center
Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights
Haitian Bridge Alliance
Harrington Investments, Inc.
Hispanic Federation
Human Rights First
Immigrant Action Alliance
Immigration Hub
Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti
Jacobs Institute of Women's Health
Just Detention International
Justice for Migrant Women
Justice in Motion
La Resistencia
Legal Action Center
Legal Aid Justice Center
Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants in Detention