



Grassroots Leadership Expresses Sadness, Outrage at Reported Sexual Abuse at Hutto Detention Center

Calls for Detention System to be Reformed to Prioritize Dignity and Release, Not Detention For-Profit

NEWS ADVISORY

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Austin, TX - Grassroots Leadership today expressed sadness and outrage at the alleged sexual abuse suffered by several immigrant women detained at the T. Don Hutto detention center in Taylor, Texas. A prison guard employed by the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), a private, for-profit corporation under federal contract to detain immigrant women at Hutto, allegedly assaulted the women. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) disclosed the abuse to advocates on Friday afternoon. The CCA guard allegedly groped several women and solicited sex from at least one woman while transporting them to the airport for deportation.

The T. Don Hutto detention center is a private prison formerly contracted to detain immigrant families, including small children. Last August, in a victory for Grassroots Leadership and our allies, Immigration and Customs Enforcement announced that it would end family detention at Hutto as part of sweeping reforms to the detention system. The facility now detains women apprehended without children, many of whom are seeking asylum in the United States. ICE has held up Hutto as a model detention center.

"We are saddened and shocked by this report of abuse," said Bob Libal, Grassroots Leadership's Texas Campaigns Coordinator. "While we were heartened that the administration took on reforming the U.S. detention system a year ago, this incident illustrates the inherent problems in an immigration detention system with no meaningful oversight. We hope that this latest news of misconduct in an immigrant detention facility will spur President Obama to action. His administration should immediately take steps to scale back its growing and out-of-control detention system."

The sexual abuse scandal is the latest in a series of such incidents at Texas detention centers. In 2007, a CCA employee was fired for inappropriate sexual contact with a female detainee who was held at the facility with her family. Earlier this year, a former Port Isabel Detention Center officer was sentenced to prison for sexual abuse of female detainees over a period of time in 2008. In 2008, an expose by the WOAI news station in San Antonio reported sexual abuse of female detainees at the GEO Group's South Texas Detention Center in Pearsall. Reports of sexual abuse against detainees have also plagued MTC's Willacy County Detention Center.

"These reports show the vulnerability of detained immigrants, especially women, in ICE's vast and largely private immigrant detention system," said Donna Red Wing, Executive Director of Grassroots Leadership. "ICE should immediately re-evaluate its contracts with all private prison corporations, and speed the pace of reforms to its system. We are gravely concerned about the reality of women incarcerated for-profit and the impact of these closed corporate facilities on the lives, health and well being of women detainees."

ICE's release of information about the reported abuse before a holiday weekend also drew criticism. "ICE has touted its move towards transparency and accountability," Libal said. "Releasing this report on a Friday afternoon before a long weekend and just hours after meeting with senior administration officials and key detention advocates at the White House is anything but transparent and accountable."

"Immigration and Customs Enforcement should immediately stop the deportation of and release potential victims of sexual assault until a thorough investigation is completed," Red Wing said. "ICE should also transform its detention system towards one that prioritizes release over detention for profit. That is the only way to ensure these tragedies do not continue."

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