



Seattle Human Rights Commission

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July 21, 2014

Seattle City Council
P.O. Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Re: Immigrant Detention Divestment Resolution

Dear Honorable Councilmembers,

On behalf of the Seattle Human Rights Commission (the “Commission”), we write to express our deep concern about the human rights situation of people detained in the Tacoma Detention Center, and we urge you and the City of Seattle (the “City”) to establish by resolution a policy that would divest the City’s funds from corporations that profit from immigrant detention.

This policy would be in keeping with the human rights principles articulated in a number of international human rights instruments, enhance the City’s status as a Human Rights City, and be consistent with past resolutions adopted by the City reflecting its desire for just and comprehensive immigration reform and the humane treatment of immigrants, regardless of their immigration status.

Today, immigrants, refugees and asylees are being treated harshly and in violation of their fundamental human rights.¹ The immigrant detention system is characterized by its lack of due process, with detainees regularly signing documents they do not understand, and receiving limited access to legal representation and judicial appeal. They have uneven access to health care and quality food, are being punished with solitary confinement for speaking out, and are vulnerable to assault and exploitation while in detention. Additionally, many immigrants live under the constant threat of deportation and family separation.

As you know, immigrant detainees have been striving to assert their due process rights and to improve conditions at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, WA. These courageous detainees and their families have continued to assert their human dignity and press for basic demands related to their treatment at the Center while also calling for an end to detention and deportation. **The individual human rights violations of immigrants in detention are being further compounded by a detention system that lacks any transparency or accountability to the public.**

¹ See, e.g., *Voices from Detention: A Report on Human Rights Violations at the Northwest Detention Center* (June 2008).

For example, **the Northwest Detention Center is run by a for-profit corporation—contracted by the United States—called GEO Group, which specialized as a defense contractor before specializing in running for-profit detention centers.** Under international human rights principles, GEO Group has the responsibility to respect human rights and to address adverse human rights impacts by taking adequate measures for their prevention, mitigation and, where appropriate, remediation.² However, research by national organizations has shown that GEO Group has actively lobbied for harsher immigration enforcement measures and against immigration reform legislation in order to increase their profits.³ Detention center contracts include minimum guarantees on the number of detainees that will be held in each center. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights strongly criticized Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s monitoring of detention centers, calling them ineffective in identifying violations of human rights standards, and reported that, “there are no legal mechanisms, short of termination of the contract, whereby Immigration and Customs Enforcement can ensure compliance with detention standards.”⁴

Currently, at least two of the City’s three investment funds have assets that are being managed by investment firms that hold significant shares in the largest private immigrant detention operators in the nation. The Commission thus passed Resolution 14-4 on July 1st, 2014 setting forth our official statement in support of a citywide policy to divest City funds from the private immigrant detention industry in order to respect human rights. We look forward to working with you and the City to make this an official citywide policy.

Respectfully,



Sarah Bishop, Co-Chair



Ethel Branch, Co-Chair

Rich Stolz

Rich Stolz, Commissioner

Alejandra Gonza

Alejandra Gonza, Secretary

² http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf

³ <http://www.thenation.com/blog/174628/disclosure-shows-private-prison-company-misled-immigration-lobbying#>

⁴ <http://cidh.oas.org/countryrep/USImmigration/Chap.IV.c.htm>