



DETENTION  
WATCH NETWORK

**#FreeThemAll:**

**Toolkit to Support Local  
Demands for Mass Release of  
People in ICE Custody**

## Acknowledgements:

This working toolkit has been drafted by Detention Watch Network with crucial input from California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance, Grassroots Leadership, Just Futures Law, Immigrant Legal Resource Center, La Resistencia, and the South East Immigrant Rights Network.

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## Introduction

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In response to the growing public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the United States government's inadequate response, we have developed this working toolkit to help guide and support the work of organizations and individuals looking to demand the release of people in ICE custody. Organizations and individuals should assess their capacity and determine what strategies and targets fit best with the resources they have available and the number of people involved. This is by no means an exhaustive list of options and existing tools, its an attempt to centralize what has already been created and make it accessible to different local and regional contexts.

If there are resources not listed here that you feel would be useful to include, please reach out to Bárbara Suárez Galeano at [bgaleano@detentionwatchnetwork.org](mailto:bgaleano@detentionwatchnetwork.org).

## Values to Guide Our Work

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- **Working towards abolition and racial justice.** Immigrant jails are part of the prison industrial complex and it is imperative that immigrant rights organizations work in solidarity and coordination with local anti-incarceration organizations to call for the release of everyone in cages, and an end to raids and local enforcement operations. County jails are a crucial part of the immigrant detention system, it's crucial that organizers supporting the release of people detained in ICE custody uplift the demands of groups working to dismantle the prison industrial complex.
- **“Nothing about us without us”** comes to us from the disability justice movement and captures the essence of how we must engage people detained in our fight for their freedom. Maintaining a constant line of communication with those inside ICE jails, and those who have survived that system, helps ensure our work is not having unintended negative consequences for people detained and responds to their immediate needs and priorities.
- **Language justice and accessibility.** We know most resources are not in the language of communities who are most impacted. In order for our communities to access and understand our work and demands, we need to translate resources to inform those impacted by these policies and their loved ones.

- **Demand Freedom for All!** This moment highlights why cages are a public health nuisance, people can't heal, recuperate, or avoid infection in jails and prisons. No one will get released unless we demand everyone be released. This is not a time to make exceptions, it's a matter of life and death. Contrary to how the government has treated this crisis, we cannot treat anyone as expendable. Our demands will in large part determine what we are able to achieve, the least we can do is push for everyone to be released.

## Federal Strategies

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### **Target: Acting Director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Matthew T. Albence**

Thus far in FY2020, there have already been at least eight reported deaths in ICE custody, the same as the total number of deaths reported in the entirety of FY2019. Given the enclosed and crowded nature of immigrant detention and ICE's demonstrated inability to deal with past infectious disease outbreaks, COVID-19 has the potential to dramatically increase the number of deaths in detention. This doesn't have to be the case. As the interim director of ICE, Director Matthew Albence oversees all of ICE's day-to-day operations and has broad authority over regional offices to order the release of people from ICE custody. Director Albence can also direct regional offices to cease all enforcement operations. This is important to prevent further population increases in detention and to avoid additional harm to immigrant communities already living in moments of extreme uncertainty due to COVID-19. Director Albence can and should take these steps to avoid preventable deaths and harm.

#### **Demands:**

- Release of all people currently detained in ICE custody
- Cease all local enforcement operations including civil enforcement and criminal referrals
- Eliminate ICE check-ins, use of electronic monitoring, and mandatory court appearances
- Make phone and video calls free for people connecting with their loved ones
- Ensure all facilities where people are detained in ICE custody, be it county jails or dedicated facilities, are prioritizing the health and well-being of people detained

#### **Tactics:**

- Have your organization join [this organizational sign-on letter](#) demanding the release of all people in ICE custody and a cease to all enforcement operations

## Target: Members of Congress

Members of Congress have the opportunity to play a significant role in how the country responds to COVID-19. Since Congress has oversight and budgetary power over federal agencies and oftentimes local agencies, they have plenty of options to both be the decision-makers and effectively pressure other targets. Therefore we need to make sure their statements and actions reflect our opposition and serve to amplify our asks. Members of Congress should be using their authority to expose ICE's inadequacies and abuse and to pressure the agency from the top down – from DHS Secretary Wolf and Acting Director Albence to field office directors and local officials in their states. Members of Congress, Congressional member delegations and Congressional staff delegations will continue to have access to the facility for the purpose of conducting oversight. This could include leveraging relationships with local elected officials in their district to halt enforcement actions or organizing their colleagues in Congress against approving any additional funding for the agency.

### How to identify your Members of Congress:

- To identify your Member of Congress in the House of Representatives, enter your ZIP code at <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>.
- To identify your Members of Congress in the Senate, enter your state at [www.senate.gov/senators/contact](http://www.senate.gov/senators/contact)
- You can also check out [this spreadsheet to see what your Members of Congress have said so far](#) about ICE's response to COVID-19.

### Demands:

- Draft an individual letter to ICE
  - Your congressional member can write an individual letter to Acting Director Matthew T. Albence to indict how little prepared ICE is to manage an outbreak in a detention facility and demand he use his authority to release people from custody.
- Pressure local target
  - Federal, state, and local officials do not exist in their own worlds. Elected officials hold extensive relationships with each other, and their actions impact each other's work. If you have a local target you need help moving, see if your Member of Congress will leverage their relationship and authority to apply additional pressure.
- Make public statement demanding release of people

- As members continue to amplify the impacts and potential solutions for COVID-19, request that they make a statement demanding the release of people from prisons and detention centers. The statement can be a press release, Twitter post, floor speech, or comment to the media.

### Tactics

- **Considerations when contacting your Member of Congress**
  - Congressional Member Offices are also practicing social distancing, being quarantined or are working from home. Consider the following as you pressure your local legislators.
    - Prioritize emailing as you send our action alerts instead of calling their in-district or DC offices
    - Use social media to amplify your demands. Make sure to include the member's social media handles and the #FreeThemAll
- Email your Member of Congress

### Template

- [Email Templates](#)

## Target: Consulates

Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador have instituted travel bans and we've heard of reports that they are not accepting deportations due to public health concerns. Consider contacting consulates to encourage them to advocate for release of their nationals. You can find the contact information for various consulates [here](#).

## State & Regional Strategies

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Federal officials and Members of Congress are not the only people able to intervene and pressure for a mass release of people in detention. Governors have the ability to intervene by initiating immediate inquiries and use the power of their office to demand ICE release people detained in their custody on the basis of public health and the liabilities mass detention represents for the community. Field Office Directors are the top ICE officials at the regional level and oversee ICE detention and enforcement operations, including ICE check-ins related to pending deportation cases.

## Target: Your State's Governor

**Demands:**

- Initiate an inquiry into ICE's response for people detained
- Demand all people in ICE custody be released, pressure local sheriffs who are holding people for ICE to release them
- Pressure sheriffs and other elected officials to stop cooperating with ICE to funnel people into detention, especially on the basis of prioritizing resources for public health
- Make a public statement demanding ICE protect people detained by releasing those in custody
- *In TX since we have SB4 (maybe a section can be added for states that have state laws) we are framing this as resource priority (which is an SB4 caveat) that in this time, resources should be going towards local public health needs and not towards ICE.*

**Templates:**

- [Letter Templates](#)
- [Call-in Script Templates](#)

**Target: ICE Field Office Director for your region ([find out who that is here](#))**

**Demands:**

- ICE must use its discretion to release all individuals at [detention centers in your locality]. To start, ICE must grant the release of people who are at high risk of serious illness.
- Provision of hygiene supplies
- Screening, testing of the people in your custody
- Quarantining in hospitals and treatment of the people in your custody.
- Access to family and community support
- Suspension of in-person check ins
- Suspension of local enforcement operations in all locations including but not limited to the community, courthouses, and through the local criminal system

**Template:**

- [Template Letter from NorCal Resists](#)

## Local Strategies

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Local decision-makers do have the power to mandate a stop to immigration enforcement activities that increase people being put in immigrant detention and should demand release of people in detention in their communities. Local health departments should take into consideration the health of all people under their jurisdiction and advocate for their wellbeing which means demanding release of people incarcerated.

### Target: Your Mayor

#### Demands:

- Call for the release of community members in local jails going through immigration proceedings and criminal legal proceedings. Put a moratorium on any more detention in local jails and declare them a public health nuisance.
- Mandate local law enforcement to stop any collaboration with ICE and DHS.
- Mandate city entities to not ask for immigration status nor share information with ICE.
- Mandate health and medical entities to serve immigrants being released and provide information in languages reflecting local immigrant population.

#### Tactics:

- Organizational sign-on letters. Calls, e-mails, social media days of action.
- Urge your city council representative to send a letter.

#### Templates:

- [Letter Templates](#)
- [Call-in Script Templates](#)
- [Template for Demands for Local Targets from Grassroots Leadership](#)

### Target: Local Health Department ([find out how to contact them here](#))- County/City Health Department Director and Board of Health

#### Demands:

- Write a public statement declaring detention a public health nuisance and calling for ICE and any private corporations involved in local contracts to release all people detained.
- Conduct and release results of an immediate in-person inquiry and on-site inspection at the detention center to find out if cases of COVID-19 exist there, how they are being



handled and communicated about, and how prevention measures beyond posters telling people to cover their cough are being taken.

- Inform the public and detained people what your plans are for addressing an outbreak at the local detention center.

**Tactics:**

- Organizational sign-on letters. Calls, e-mails, social media days of action.
- [Letter Templates](#)
- [Call-in Script Templates](#)

**Target: Sheriff's Departments****Demands:**

- Stop any collaboration with ICE in any way, including but not limited to 287(g) agreements; allowing ICE in the jail for any purpose including ICE arrests, information-sharing, or ICE interviews; information-sharing with ICE including a person's release date, access to local databases, booking information or any other local information; supporting in ICE raids; and joint task forces.. Cooperating with ICE funnels people directly into detention, which only increases the number of people in detention, heightening the risk of a health crisis.
- Decrease the number of people in the overcrowded criminal systems by engaging in increased early release, increased cite and release, suspend booking of people for parole or probation violations, take immediate steps for pretrial release in particular for vulnerable populations, and for those who remain in custody immediately develop testing and healthcare protocols as well as increased access to visitation, phones calls, and mail. Fewer people in the criminal system means fewer people funneled en mass to detention.
- Stop receiving community members to be detained at facilities under your jurisdiction.
- Ask local health departments to conduct on-site inspections immediately and provide resources as people are released and to their loved ones.
- Support release of people in detention.

**Tactics:**

- Organizational sign-on letters. Calls, e-mails, social media days of action.
- Letters from the Board of Supervisors who have control over the sheriff's department budget and any oversight committees.
- Consider targeting the Warrant Service Officer program, if applicable.

**Templates:**

- [Letter Templates](#)
- [Call-in Script Templates](#)

### What is a 287(g)?

- Does your locality or a neighboring locality have a 287(g) agreement?
- [Check out this map](#) put together by the Immigrant Legal Resource Center that tracks 287(g) agreements across the country and offers resources for those who want to fight back.

## Target: Board of Supervisors

### Demands:

- Write a public statement declaring detention a public health nuisance and calling for ICE and any private corporations involved in local contracts to release all people detained.
- Mandate the Public Health Department to conduct and release results of an immediate in-person inquiry and on-site inspection at the detention center to find out if cases of COVID-19 exist there, how they are being handled and communicate the actions and results to the community publicly.
- Demand that the Sheriff Department end collaboration with ICE including through 287(g) agreements, raids, joint task forces, ICE access to the jails including for ICE interviews and arrests, or information sharing such as databases or booking sheets. When local law enforcement cooperates with ICE, this funnels more people to detention, only heightening the risk of a health crisis.

### Tactics:

- Organizational sign-on letters. Calls, e-mails, social media days of action.

### Templates

- [Letter Templates](#)
- [Call-in Script Templates](#)

## Target: City Council

### Demands:

- Write a public statement declaring detention a public health nuisance and calling for ICE and any private corporations involved in local contracts to release all people detained.
- Mandate the Public Health Department to conduct and release results of an immediate in-person inquiry and on-site inspection at the detention center to find out if cases of



COVID-19 exist there, how they are being handled and communicate the actions and results to the community publicly.

- Place a moratorium on any local law enforcement collaboration with ICE including raids, joint task forces, ICE interviews inside of jails and sharing of information with ICE that will increase the number of people in detention and heighten the risk of a health crisis.

**Tactics:**

- Organizational sign-on letters. Calls, e-mails, social media days of action.

**Templates:**

- [Letter Templates](#)
- [Call-in Script Templates](#)

## Templates & Resources for Lawyers, Public Defenders, & Legal Aid Orgs

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- [Letter from Legal Aid Orgs in NY Demanding Release](#)
- [Materials for Humanitarian Release developed by Just Futures Law](#)
- [Alameda County Letter to ICE field director demanding release](#)
- [Immigration Judges, Prosecutors, and Attorneys Call for the Nationwide Closure of All Immigration Courts](#)
- [ACLU \(along with NWIRP & La Resistencia\) Sue ICE for Release of Immigrants Especially Vulnerable to COVID-19](#)
- [Letter from Civil Rights Organizations calling for the CA Governor to release state prisoners](#)

## Communications Resources:

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- [DWN Messaging Guidance in English and Spanish](#)
- [DWN graphics and templates in English and Spanish](#)

## Media Coverage & Resources to Support your Demands:

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### Jail Releases in response to COVID-19:

- [Inmates in Ohio being released due to concern of coronavirus spread](#)
- [Travis County Judges Releasing Inmates to Limit Coronavirus Spread](#)
- [Justice LA Coalition - Steps forward in Reducing Number of People Jailed](#)

### COVID-19 and Immigration Detention

- [Immigration court staffers were ordered to take down bilingual CDC-issued coronavirus posters](#)
- [Coronavirus inevitable in prison-like US immigration centers, doctors say](#)
- [ICE Is Arresting Central Americans As They Drop Off Relatives For Flights at JFK](#)
- [Cook County Jail should reduce population to address coronavirus threat](#)
- [Opinion: An Epicenter of the Pandemic will be Jails and Prisons, if Inaction Continues](#)
- [With masks at the ready, ICE agents make arrests on first day of California coronavirus lockdown](#)

### Additional media coverage

- [Just Futures Law's living list of media coverage](#)

## Tracking Outbreaks in your Area

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We've been receiving reports of COVID-19 outbreaks in several detention centers thus far and are working to track these as a way to build out our call for mass release, and assess areas that need more support. We are in the process of determining the best way to share this information with the public, keeping in mind it is hard to verify reports when our communication with people detained is so limited. We will follow up in the coming days with updates on reported outbreaks.

Please contact DWN organizer, Marcela Hernandez, at [mhernandez@detentionwatchnetwork.org](mailto:mhernandez@detentionwatchnetwork.org) to report an outbreak. Please make sure to include information on how you confirmed there was an outbreak, how many people have been reportedly affected, transfers, and if the detention center has responded by shifting operation policies in any way.

## Additional Resources

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- [National Bail Fund Network's Messaging and Demands on COVID-19](#)
- [Public Health Statement on Incarceration and COVID-19](#)
- [Justice Collaborative](#) - Resources on responses to COVID-19
- [Local Prosecutor Demands](#) by Fair and Just Prosecutions
- [Resource for California Immigrant Communities by CIYJA](#)
- [Comprehensive COVID-19 Resource List](#)
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention COVID-19 Explainer Pages
  - [English](#)
  - [Spanish](#)
  - [Chinese](#)

## Calls to Action from Organizations Fighting Mass Incarceration

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- Lenox Township, MI: [Macomb Correctional Facility Phone Zap - Organized by Fight Toxic Prisons](#)
- Travis County, TX: [Coalition Letter Travis County Jails and Agencies](#)
- Los Angeles, CA: [Coalition Letter to LA County Jails and Courthouses](#)
- Cook County, IL: [Call-in to Cook County Sheriff's Office and Chief Judge](#)
- New York, NY: [NYC Board of Corrections Call for Release](#)
- Washington, DC: [Call to Action and List of Demands by No New Jails DC](#)

## Coordinating your Community to Welcome People Being Released

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We know from past examples that ICE's cruel treatment frequently extends into release. Should ICE release people from its custody, we can expect that they will do so in a haphazard way. For example, we've seen ICE release people at bus stations without weather-appropriate clothing, funds, or even basic guidance or instructions about where they are. Predictably, this has led to confusion, people getting stranded, and difficulty accessing support. For these reasons, it is important that our communities proactively assess what resources exist in our communities to

support people released from ICE custody and how best to coordinate and allocate those resources.

**Here are some best practices we recommend considering as you develop your community release response plan:**

- **Form a group:** Before forming your own logistical team, research whether there are existing mutual aid rapid response networks in your region to avoid reinventing the wheel. Check with trusted community members and existing migrant rights organizations to see who can commit to mobilizing to meet released community members. Consider assigning a couple of volunteer coordinators who can help with group follow-up and communications and schedules, as needed.
- **Don't panic, but be smart:** Please note, given the threat which COVID-19 poses to communities everywhere, you may want to consider forming a logistical team of young adults without underlying health conditions or compromised immune systems who, outside of emergency solidarity mobilizations, can commit to practice social distancing and other precautionary measures. Should one of the volunteers exhibit any flu-like symptoms, that person should notify the volunteer coordinators and/or group and isolate themselves.
- **Share knowledge and resources:** As a general precautionary measure to both volunteers and released community members, set aside some basic prevention supplies including hand sanitizer that contain at least 60% alcohol, disinfectant wipes or spray, and disposable masks to be distributed to immigrants only if they exhibit any flu-like symptoms. If you have enough supplies, make emergency travel bags with the above items and give them to immigrants who are traveling to another location. Some trips may take several days so include some basic travel items like toothbrushes and toothpaste and snacks. Finally, you can expect that ICE hasn't done its part in providing even basic information to immigrants on how to protect themselves from COVID-19 and prevent spread. Ask those being released if they've received any guidance on COVID-19. If they haven't, offer to share resources like this CDC [one-pager](#).
- **Emergency housing:** Although many people may choose to immediately travel on to their next destination, for a variety of reasons, others may choose to or need to stay in the community they are released into. Assess together and with partner groups what trusted organizations may be willing to offer short-term emergency housing support. Places of worship, for example, may be good institutions to approach. Finally, check with your volunteers and/or other trusted community members to see if they have the capacity and ability to also provide support should the need arise.
- **Pooling medical resources:** If you have a relationship with trusted medical professionals, ask them now if they would be willing to be on call to offer support and recommendations should an immigrant exhibit any flu-like symptoms. Ask furthermore,

whether there are other trusted medical professionals in their network that they can ask to also support.

- **Community Financial Support Funds:** Migrant communities often depend on each other for financial support to get through difficult times. Given that all members of the family can be out of work because of the increase in city mandates to “shelter in place” it will be difficult to support community members being released from detention. Start creating support funds through venmo, gofundme and paypal to support individuals and their families.
- **Don’t reinvent the wheel:** If ICE releases people in mass, it will definitely take work and coordination from our communities, but remember it’s not the first or last time that our communities will rise to the occasion. Many border communities, for example, have been responding to mass releases for several years now. If there are groups in your area already doing similar work, connect with them for localized tips and coordination! For one set of additional tips/recommendations on what other details to consider when supporting released community members, check out [this video](#) by the Rio Grande Equal Voice Network.

## Existing Petitions / Organizing by State

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### Florida

- Petition - [Miami-Dade Community Call for Decarceration](#)

### Maryland

- Petition - [Urging Governor Hogan to issue an Executive Order for Marylanders in detention, jails, prisons, or interaction with law enforcement](#)

### Minnesota

- Petition - [No One Is Sentenced to Die From Coronavirus - Emergency Recommendations for MN’s Incarcerated](#)

### Ohio

- Petition - [Keep COVID-19 out of Ohio Jails, Prisons, and Courts](#)

### Texas

- [RAICES letter to ICE Field Office Director](#) - Daniel Bible (San Antonio Field Office)

### Washington



- Petition - [Endorse an Abolitionist Public Health: #COVID19mutualaid demands to DOC & Governor Inslee](#)

## National Petitions

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- [Open Letter to ICE From Medical Professionals Urging the Release of Individuals in Immigration Detention Given the Risk of COVID-19](#) -
  - For questions or to join these efforts please contact: Dr. Chanelle Diaz, MD, MPH at [chanellediaz@gmail.com](mailto:chanellediaz@gmail.com) or Mia Soto at [msoto@nylpi.org](mailto:msoto@nylpi.org)