



1080 N. Delaware Ave.
Suite 300 D
Philadelphia, PA 19125

Centre Square East
1500 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102

215-287-2114 PHONE
267-773-4430 FAX

215-731-7145 PHONE
215-731-2400 FAX

NURSELEDCARE.ORG

October 28, 2020

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

Dear Mr. Cuffari:

On behalf of the undersigned nursing organizations, we write regarding a [complaint filed](#) to your office on September 14, 2020 regarding “Lack of Medical Care, Unsafe Work Practices, and Absence of Adequate Protection Against COVID-19 for Detained Immigrants and Employees Alike at the Irwin County Detention Center,” and to call for an immediate and thorough investigation.

We commend Dawn Wooten, LPN for her courage and sacrifice in exposing the horrific conditions at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility Irwin County Detention Center (ICDC) in Ocilla, Georgia. As a nurse at ICDC, Ms. Wooten’s testimony described unsafe, unsanitary conditions, a lack of testing and treatment for people detained who contracted COVID-19, and reproductive health violations against those in custody.

As the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has taken hundreds of thousands of lives across the country, Ms. Wooten and detainees interviewed for the complaint allege that those held at ICDC did not receive COVID tests even when they presented symptoms, were not separated from other detainees who presented symptoms, and that records of requests for medical care were destroyed by ICDC personnel. One immigrant described ICDC as “the dirtiest facility I have ever been in.” This negligence in the face of unprecedented health risks is an unconscionable violation of human rights.

Singularly troubling among Ms. Wooten’s allegations were the high rates of hysterectomies performed on immigrant women, who often did not understand what procedure they were undergoing or why. We, the nursing community recognize our nation’s [long and troubled history](#) of forced sterilization and medical experimentation imposed on Black and brown people. These new allegations are reflective of the darkest moments in our history and are a natural result of systems that devalue the lives of women of color in the United States every day. The role of nurses is to care for and protect the health and dignity of their patients. It is our duty as nursing organizations to shed light on these abuses and to protect others who do the same.

The treatment of immigrants detained in ICE custody is a public health crisis. As a community of professional nursing organizations, we stand in support of Dawn Wooten and call for a prompt, thorough, and transparent investigation into her allegations of mistreatment at ICDC, as well as an investigation into all ICE facilities operated by LaSalle Corrections. This inquiry should include recommendations for immediate corrective action, where needed. The people detained at

ICDC deserve justice, and Dawn Wooten is owed our trust and attention for her bravery in speaking out. We commend her efforts and call for a swift resolution to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

National Nurse-Led Care Consortium

Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

American College of Nurse-Midwives

American Public Health Association, Public Health Nursing Section

Arkansas Birthing Project