

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 10, 2020

Joseph V. Cuffari
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane SW
Washington, DC 20528-0305

Dear Inspector General Cuffari:

We write today to request that your office investigate conditions at the Nevada Southern Detention Center in Pahrump, Nevada. This detention facility is operated by CoreCivic through contracts with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) and the U.S. Marshals Service. A number of reports have raised concerns regarding unsafe conditions at the facility for both detainees and employees, as well as potential violations of CoreCivic’s federal contracts.

Recent concerning incidents, including an inmate’s murder and an employee’s on-site suicide, have shown that CoreCivic is not able to guarantee the safety of detainees within this facility and challenge the company’s ability to protect the health of its own employees.¹ Furthermore, concerns have been raised in recent days regarding the standards to which the company holds its employees after it was revealed that a captain at the Nevada Southern Detention Center was active on a Neo-Nazi website.² In fact, as recently as June 2017, the employee publicly expressed his intent to establish a white nationalist chapter in his community. With overwhelming evidence that hate crimes are on the rise in the United States, it is critical for our government to take concrete steps to combat them.

The Department of Homeland Security’s (“DHS”) use of private detention centers also raises a number of questions that require further discussion and investigation. It is imperative that any private company contracted with the federal government to operate a detention facility be held to the highest standards of care and management. It is also critical that transparency and oversight not be hindered because the facility is operated by a private entity through a federal contract.

To better understand ICE’s efforts to conduct adequate management and oversight of its contractors and to ensure vulnerable immigrants are protected while in the custody of DHS or

¹ Rio Lacanlale, “Suspect in death at Pahrump detention center is victim’s co-defendant,” *Las Vegas Review Journal*, July 16, 2019, <https://www.reviewjournal.com/crime/homicides/suspect-in-death-at-pahrump-detention-center-is-victims-co-defendant-1736082/> and Jenny Wilson, “Corrections employee commits suicide at Pahrump federal detention facility,” *Las Vegas Review Journal*, June 14, 2017, <https://www.reviewjournal.com/local/local-nevada/corrections-employee-commits-suicide-at-pahrump-federal-detention-facility/>.

² Tess Owen, “ICE Detention Center Captain Was on a Neo-Nazi Website and Wanted to Start a White Nationalist Group,” *VICE News*, January 7, 2020, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/y3mg9x/ice-detention-center-captain-was-on-a-neo-nazi-website-and-wanted-to-start-a-white-nationalist-group.

DHS contractors, we request that your office investigate staffing and conditions at the Nevada Southern Detention Center, including addressing the following concerns:

1. The extent to which the facility complies with federally-required standards for the health and safety of detainees.
2. The policies and procedures CoreCivic has in place regarding the following issues, and the extent to which the Pahrump facility has complied with such policies and procedures:
 - a. Employee safety
 - b. Employee hiring and screening
 - c. Employee misconduct
3. Any actions taken by the facility to improve health, safety, and other standards in the past five years.
4. The extent to which ICE oversees and ensures CoreCivic's compliance with its obligations under its federal contract.
5. Whether it is standard practice for DHS to review the hiring policies of contractors who manage ICE detention facilities.
6. Whether DHS requested information from CoreCivic related to the company's nondiscrimination, anti-harassment, and/or anti-retaliation policies to ensure that detainees in its custody are not subjected to discrimination by CoreCivic employees.
7. Whether DHS provides training and/or oversight to contractors regarding hiring, non-discrimination, anti-harassment, and/or anti-retaliation practices or requires its contractors to provide such training to its employees.

The federal government has an obligation to ensure that individuals in its care, whether in a federally- or privately-operated facility, are subject to safe and healthy environments. We appreciate your response to these concerns.

Sincerely,


Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator


Jacky Rosen
United States Senator