

To the House Committee on Judiciary,

I am writing in strong support of House Bill 5724. This bill would prohibit state and municipal officials or body from entering into and renewing any agreements that will be used to detain individuals for federal civil immigration violations.

States across the country have passed legislation banning private prisons and detention centers. With the passage of this legislation Rhode Island can join other states in creating a community free of exploitative and inhumane immigration detention practices. The Wyatt Detention Center detains immigrants through its Intergovernmental Service Agreement (IGSA) with ICE. By prohibiting IGSA contracts (that allow ICE to use state and local resources for detention) immigration detention would be effectively banned in the state of Rhode Island.

This legislation would prevent private companies like GeoGroup and CoreCivic from stepping in to open up private detention facilities. It's no secret that detention centers run by corporations and investors prioritize their profits and keeping beds filled over the humanity and rights of the people it keeps detained. This legislation would prevent Rhode Island from being a place where companies can open up factories of neglect and abuse. This is a disgusting financial incentive to keep people incarcerated. Relying on the oppression of Rhode Island and our fellow Americans should never be an option for financial gain or economic development.

On April 4th, 2020, 60 people detained by ICE at the Wyatt launched a hunger strike to demand safer conditions and their release amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The Wyatt staff responded by retaliating against the hunger strikers by cutting off phone access and placing people in isolation. This retaliatory punishment is unacceptable. The Wyatt has a long history of neglect. The Wyatt consistently fails to provide access to communication with the outside world, including detainees' legal counsel. This has happened most notably recently with New Hampshire resident Fabien Schmidt, who was detained by ICE and is currently being held at the Wyatt. His lawyer and his family have had limited access to communication with him even though he is in this country legally.

Having an ICE detention center in Rhode Island conflicts with the values of a community with a massive immigrant population. Immigrants do not detract from this county, they make it better. If we want immigrants in Rhode Island to feel safe and valued here then we need to close down the Wyatt and stop any chance of any kind of immigrant detention happening here ever again.

Please support H5724. Thank you.

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