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Testimony in Support of HB-5724

Sophia Wright

Alliance to Mobilize Our Resistance -AMOR-

House Committee on Judiciary,

April 10th 2025

My name is Sophia Wright. I am giving testimony on behalf of the AMOR Network in support of Representative Giraldo's bill HB-5724 that would prohibit municipalities from using public resources to establish contracts with ICE.

The bill would require the Wyatt Detention Center to end its current relationship with ICE, which would be a benefit for the entire community. AMOR advocates for a community free of the criminalization of immigrants and inhumane detention practices.

This legislation is modeled off of laws that have already been implemented in other states.

My testimony will speak to the history of the Wyatt and the implications for the community as I know other folks will speak to the current abuses and inhumane practices that folks are currently facing. Representatives can reference the recent report compiled by AMOR's community that contains testimony of folks currently detained at the Wyatt, which should be included amongst your materials.

The Wyatt Detention Center is the failed example of the deadly Economics of detention for profit. In 1991 the nonprofit Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation was created to pursue economic development for the City of Central Falls through the ownership of The Wyatt Detention Center. For nearly two decades the Wyatt Detention Center has failed to perform its founding purpose: to be a consistent source of income for the city of Central Falls.

The CFDFC has not sent a payment to the City since 2021 when it sent a symbolic donation of \$50,000. On the contrary, the Wyatt has been the recipient of public funds intended for COVID relief including \$2.9 million in taxpayer-backed funding.

Like Private Detention Centers across the country, the Wyatt is only accountable to its bondholder. This means even in the face of patterns of neglect within the Wyatt, Investors still push for the institution to increase the number of people it detains.

No city should rely on prisons and detention centers as a form of economic development.

Officials with the the City of Central Falls are limited in how they can advocate for the rights of folks experiencing detention at the Wyatt. In 2019 the ICE contract with the Wyatt was reopened. After widespread demands to remove ICE from the Wyatt Detention Center the City elected to initiate the process of ending the contract. Bondholders responded by suing the City of Central Falls "In April [2019], the company sued the city of Central Falls and the chair of the detention center's board of directors, Joseph Molina Flynn, for their decision to stop receiving ICE detainees into the facility. The company's complaint, filed in US District Court in Providence, claimed that removal of ICE detainees from the facility would have a negative effect on the Wyatt's assets and demanded \$130 million in damages. In addition, UMB Bank seeks to place a temporary restraining order against the Wyatt's city-appointed board, asking to stop it from interfering in the management of the facility."¹

¹ Source: [The Museum Trustee Behind a \\$130 Million Lawsuit to Keep ICE Detainees in Prison \(hyperallergic.com\)](https://www.hyperallergic.com)



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As a result of the temporary restraining order against the city of Central Falls city officials are no longer allowed to speak out against the Wyatt publicly to condemn practices there, especially if private investors will view that speech as damaging to the operation of their business. **The City of Central Falls is in charge of the Wyatt Detention Facility in name only.**

The Wyatt has a Gross History of Medical Neglect

In 2008 "Jason" Ng Hiu Lui, a migrant in the process of getting his Green Card died in immense pain of liver cancer while detained at the facility due to medical neglect and cruelty. A legal claim filed on Jason's behalf stated that guards would drag him by his arms and legs because they claimed Jason was only pretending to be sick.

During the COVID 19 Pandemic the Wyatt Staff retaliated against detainees demanding safer conditions by cutting off phone access and placing people in isolation.

To date AMOR receives requests from detainees at the Wyatt for support accessing basic medical attention for ongoing health issues, which has resulted in the deterioration of existing medical conditions. The Wyatt continues to demonstrate its inability to provide adequate and timely access to basic health care to folks in ICE detention.

ICE Detention Conflicts with the Values of the Community

The City of Central Falls is a community that is 69.1% Hispanic or Latino and 39.4% foreign born.² 69.9% of the population speaks a language other than English at home. **Central Falls is a community shaped by immigrants who are building their lives here in RI.** The children of Central Falls should not be forced to live with the looming presence of an immigration detention center across from where they play.

In recent weeks we have watched members of our community snatched off of the streets, torn away from their families and detained at the Wyatt without rhyme or reason to be subject to the Wyatt's inhumane practices.

We recognize 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.

We urge you to consider these points in support of Representative Giraldo's legislation HB-5724 that would prohibit municipalities from establishing contracts with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Sincerely,

Sophia Wright
Alliance to Mobilize Our Resistance -AMOR-
sophia@amorri.org

² [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts - Population estimates, July 1, 2023. \(V2023\)](#)

Fact Sheet

Ban ICE Contracts with Prisons and Private Detention in RI

Reasons to Vote in Favor of House of Representatives H-5724 | Senate S-0295

This legislation would prohibit any state or municipal government official or agency from entering into any contract to detain individuals for civil immigration violations, and terminating any such contract in existence by July 1, 2025. It would further prohibit the use of any public resources to detain individuals for federal civil immigration violations

States across the country have passed legislation banning private prisons & detention centers. With the passage of this legislation RI can join other states in creating a community free of exploitative & inhumane immigration detention practices. **This legislation is modeled off of legislation passed by other states.**

Deadly Economics:

Regarding the Wyatt Detention Center

In 1991 the nonprofit Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation was created to pursue economic development for the City of Central Falls through the ownership of The Wyatt Detention Center.¹ **For nearly two decades the Wyatt Detention Center has failed to perform its founding purpose: being a consistent source of income for the city of Central Falls.**

The CFDFC has not sent a payment to the City since 2021. Chairman Lombardi [of the CFDFC] stated that “no payments have been made to the city even though this money is in the budget and we would like to make payments the bond holders will not allow it.”² See attached table for details.

On the contrary, Wyatt has been the recipient of public funds intended for COVID relief. A spokesman, Christopher Hunter, said Wyatt received \$2.9 million in taxpayer-backed funding, which was used for payroll.³

Like Private Detention Centers across the country, the Wyatt is only accountable to its bondholder. This means even in the face of patterns of neglect within the Wyatt, Investors still push for the institution to increase the number of people it detains.

No city should rely on prisons and detention centers as a form of economic development.

ICE Detainee Count as of January 22nd 2024: 66⁴

The Wyatt has a Gross History of Medical Neglect

In 2008 "Jason" Ng Hiu Lui, a migrant from Hong Kong died in immense pain of liver cancer while detained at the facility due to medical

¹ [Source: Special Joint Legislative Commission on the Wyatt Detention Facility](#)
Date: April 25, 2012

² [Central Falls Detention Center Facility Corporation Board of Directors Meeting Notes, 1/22/2024](#)

³ [Watchdog Team: Swarovski Optik, Wyatt prison among R.I. recipients of PPP small business loans \(providencejournal.com\)](#)

⁴ref. "2"

neglect and cruelty. A legal claim filed on Jason's behalf stated that guards would drag him by his arms and legs because they claimed Jason was only pretending to be sick.⁵

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.

To date the AMOR Network receives requests from detainees at the Wyatt for support accessing basic medical attention for ongoing health issues, which has resulted in the deterioration of existing medical conditions. The Wyatt continues to demonstrate its inability to provide adequate and timely access to basic health care to folks in ICE detention.

ICE Detention Conflicts with the Values of the Community

The City of Central Falls is a community that is 69.1% Hispanic or Latino and 39.4% foreign born.⁶ 69.9% of the population speaks a language other than English at home. **Central Falls is a community shaped by immigrants who are building their lives here in RI.** The children of Central Falls should not be forced to live with the looming presence of a prison across from the field where they play sports after school.

Prevention

This legislation would prevent private companies like GeoGroup and CoreCivic from stepping into the gap left by the prohibition of ICE contracts to open up private detention facilities.

We recognize 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.

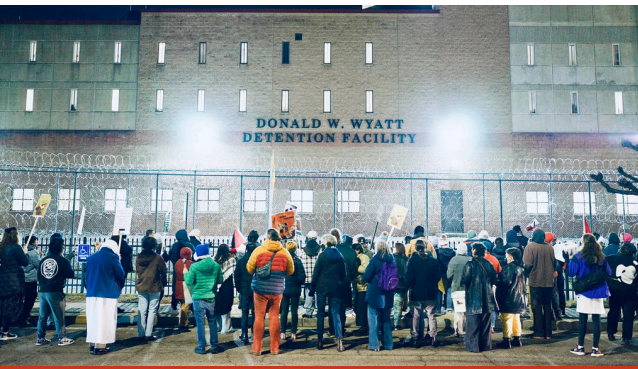
⁵ [Wyatt Facility to Once Again House Ice Immigration Detainees; ACLU Raises Specter of The Death Of Jason Ng](#)

⁶ [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts - Population estimates, July 1, 2023. \(V2023\)](#)

Timeline of Payments from the Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation to the City of Central Falls		
Year	Amount	Note
1994 through 2008	\$5.3 million	1994 through 2008, the City received a total of \$5.3 million in impact fees from the Wyatt facility; <i>[Citation 1]</i>
2009		Facility went into receivership due to financial mismanagement and debt halting payments to the city. <i>[Citation 1]</i>
2017	\$133,000	The Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation paid the city a voluntary \$133,000 impact fee in 2017 and another \$50,000 in donations in 2021. <i>[Citation 6]</i>
2019		In 2019 the ICE contract with the Wyatt was reopened. After widespread demands to remove ICE from the Wyatt Detention Center the City elected to initiate the process of ending the contract. Bondholders responded by suing the City of Central Falls for \$130 million in damages
April 2020		Wyatt received \$2.9 million in taxpayer-backed funding, which was used for payroll. According to federal data, 240 jobs were retained. Paycheck Protection Program loans, administered through the federal government via private lenders, were part of the CARES Act, a massive federal rescue package aimed at shoring up an economy battered by coronavirus shutdowns. The Wyatt loan was approved April 6th 2020. <i>[Citation 3]</i>
Dec 2020		"Lombardi said that after the pandemic hit in 2020, the detainee population plunged and Wyatt began losing \$25,000 a week. By December 2020, the accounts payable total had risen from \$500,000 to \$2.3 million." <i>[Citation 7]</i>
2021	\$50,000	CFDFC paid \$50,000 in donations to CF in 2021 <i>[Citation 6]</i>
July 2022		The board of CFDFC requested they start making \$25,000 a month payments to Central Falls
January 2025		January 13, 2025 We have not made any payments to the City, but we will have an agreement at some point that will be beneficial to all parties."

Sources Cited:

1. Special Joint Legislative Commission on the Wyatt Detention Facility, April 25, 2012
<<https://www.rilegislature.gov/sfiscal/Other%20Documents/Report%20of%20the%20Special%20Joint%20Commission%20to%20Study%20the%20Wyatt%20Detention%20Facility.pdf>>
2. Central Falls Detention Center Facility Corporation Board of Directors Meeting Notes, 1/22/2024
<<https://opengov.sos.ri.gov/Common/DownloadMeetingFiles?FilePath=\Minutes\4440\2024\486046.pdf>>
3. Watchdog Team: Swarovski Optik, Wyatt prison among R.I. recipients of PPP small business loans (providencejournal.com), 07/08/2020,
<<https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/coronavirus/2020/07/08/watchdog-team-swarovski-optik-wyatt-prison-among-ri-recipients-of-ppp-small-business-loans/42606623/>>
4. Wyatt Facility to Once Again House Ice Immigration Detainees; ACLU Raises Specter of The Death Of Jason Ng, 03/22/2019,
<<https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/wyatt-facility-once-again-house-ice-immigration-detainees-aclu-raises-specter-death>>
5. U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts - Population estimates, July 1, 2023, (V2023)<<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/tablecentralfallscityrhodeisland/PST045223>>
6. "Wyatt creditor takes aim seeking payment for services performed nearly 20 years ago", 07/05/2023,
<<https://rhodeislandcurrent.com/2023/07/05/wyatt-creditor-takes-aim-seeking-payment-for-services-performed-nearly-20-years-ago/>>
7. "After nearly closing, Wyatt is moving toward stability" 7/14/2022,
<<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2022/07/14/metro/after-nearly-closing-wyatt-is-moving-toward-stability/>>



APRIL 2025



REPORT ON ICE DETENTION AT THE WYATT DETENTION FACILITY

CENTRAL FALLS, RI

Dear Community,

This report comes at the behest of people currently detained by ICE at the Wyatt Detention Facility who contacted us in March 2025 to share about detention conditions in Central Falls, RI and to urgently request that we make their experiences known.

What follows is based on a March 10, 2025 letter from 13 concerned detainees, in addition to correspondence with more than 40 individuals detained by ICE at the Wyatt Detention Facility during March 2025. As of February 24, 2025, 111 people were detained by ICE at the facility, which board members described as “at capacity.” (Source: Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation Minutes, February 24, 2025, p.1)

We share these words and ask Rhode Islanders to **respond to the calls of those currently detained** by supporting **Senate Bill S-0295** and **House Bill HB-5724** in the current legislative session to **end ICE detention in Rhode Island**.

In Solidarity,
AMOR Community Response Team

above photo: December 31, 2024 Noise Rally outside the Wyatt

March 10, 2025 Letter from 13 Concerned Detainees

Testimonies of Medical Neglect

Testimonies of Imprisonment for Profit

Testimonies of Hunger

Testimonies of Racism and Arbitrary Punishment

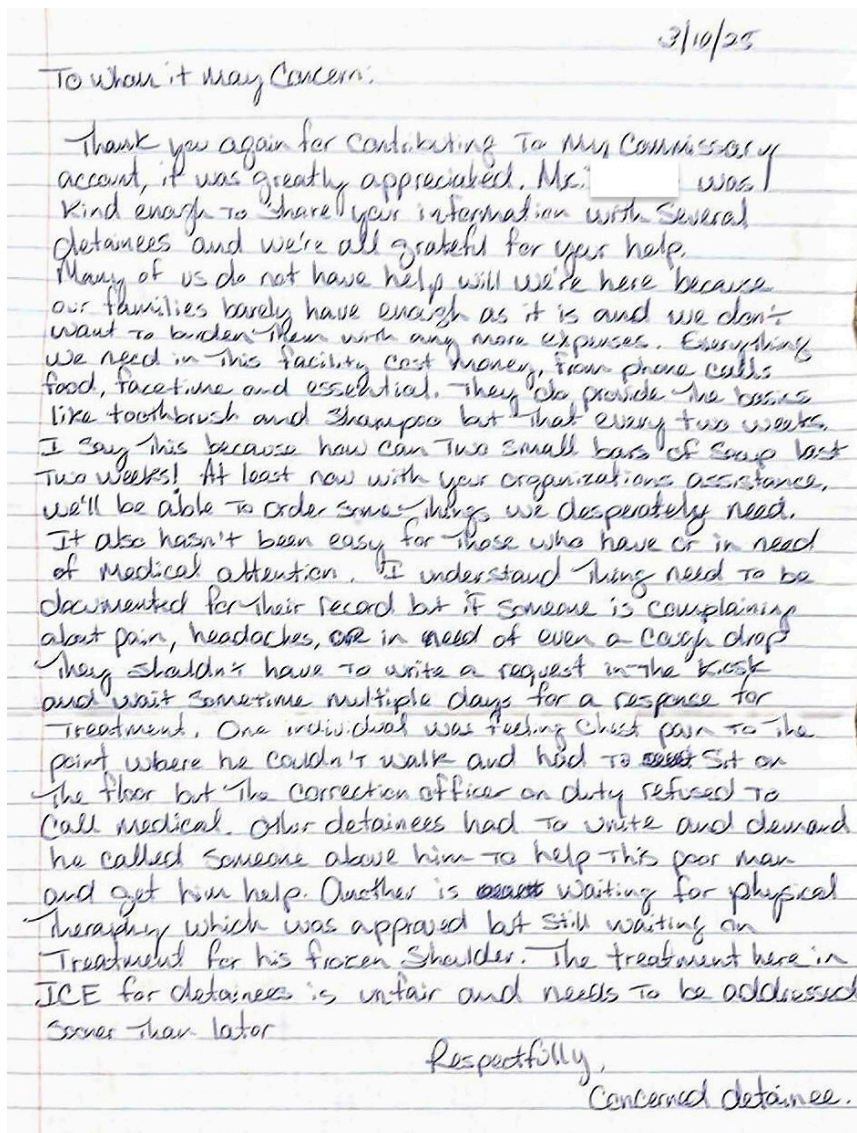
What You Can Do!

March 10, 2025 Letter from 13 Concerned Detainees

“ The treatment here in ICE for detainees is unfair and needs to be addressed.

— Concerned detainee, March 2025

”



3/10/25

To whom it may concern:

Thank you again for contacting to my Commission of account, it was greatly appreciated. Mr. [redacted] was kind enough to share your information with several detainees and we're all grateful for your help. Many of us do not have help while we're here because our families barely have enough as it is and we don't want to burden them with any more expenses. Everything we need in this facility costs money, from phone calls, food, facetime and essentials. They do provide the basics like toothbrush and shampoo but that every two weeks. I say this because how can two small bars of soap last two weeks! At least now with your organizations assistance, we'll be able to order some things we desperately need. It also hasn't been easy for those who have or in need of medical attention. I understand things need to be documented for their record but if someone is complaining about pain, headaches, or in need of even a cough drop they shouldn't have to write a request in the kiosk and wait sometime multiple days for a response for treatment. One individual was feeling chest pain to the point where he couldn't walk and had to ~~rest~~ sit on the floor but the correction officer on duty refused to call medical. Other detainees had to write and demand he called someone above him to help this poor man and get his help. Another is ~~waiting~~ waiting for physical therapy which was approved but still waiting on treatment for his frozen shoulder. The treatment here in ICE for detainees is unfair and needs to be addressed sooner than later.

Respectfully,
Concerned detainee.

“ “Many of us do not have help while we're here because **our families barely have enough as it is** and we don't want to burden them with any more expenses. Everything we need in this facility costs money, from phone calls, food, facetime and essentials.”

— Concerned detainee, March 2025

”

Testimonies of Medical Neglect

AMOR has received new reports that medical treatment has been deeply concerning at the Wyatt recently. This continues an ongoing pattern over many years of reports of medical neglect at the Wyatt, including those that preceded the death of Hui Lui “Jason” Ng due to medical abuse from prison staff at the Wyatt in 2008.

“ Many of us get sick and they don’t care what happens to us. We report it at the kiosk and they ignore it. There is a person here with very high blood sugar and it took them a while to take care of him. There are many who have waited two months without changing the bed sheets.

— Message received March 2025

”

In the first two weeks of March, AMOR received **12** messages from people detained at the Wyatt specifically highlighting medical neglect.

People detained report being **denied medical care** for chronic conditions and necessary vaccines, and report that **Wyatt staff do not respond** to requests for medical care.

Witnesses said that three people recently fainted and did not receive medical care.

- Over the course of 2024, 12 medical staff were terminated/resigned/retired, while only 10 were hired/re-hired. Over that same period, the number of **people detained by ICE doubled** compared to early 2024, to around 110. Among the terminations, between November 2024 and January 2025, 1 doctor was terminated/resigned/retired, and **no doctor had been hired/re-hired** as of February 24, 2025.

(Source: Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation Minutes, January 22, 2024 to February 24, 2025)

- Just before doubling the number of people detained by ICE, the Central Falls Detention Center Corporation began contracting with BioReference for Clinical Laboratory Services in order to secure **"a significantly lower rate"** compared to the previous contractor.

(Source: Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation Minutes, June 17, 2024, p.3)

- Meanwhile, the average revenue of the Corporation in 2024 was \$4 million per month.

(Source: Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation Minutes, November 18, 2024, p.3)

“ If someone is complaining about pain, headaches or in need of even a cough drop they shouldn't have to write a request in the kiosk and wait sometimes multiple days for a response for treatment. One individual was feeling chest pain to the point where he couldn't walk and had to sit on the floor but the correction officer on duty refused to call medical. Other detainees had to unite and demand he call someone above him to help this poor man.

— Concerned detainee, March 2025

”

Testimonies of Imprisonment for Profit

“ The calls are expensive and I think they should be free, and the recreation systems—live films, videos, news, songs, and even video games to pass time—are reasons to charge money while they should be free. **I'm starting to believe that everything here wants money in exchange or happiness and freedom.**

— Message received March 2025

”

The Wyatt is run by the **Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation**. Corporations and banks outside Rhode Island lent money to the Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation to run the Wyatt (through bonds) and are still waiting for a return on their investment.

The City of Central Falls owns the land that the prison sits on. The Corporation has **paid nothing to the people of Central Falls** since 2021, either in taxes or in other payments.

(Source: Panel on the Wyatt Detention Facility in Central Falls, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, 2023.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4xUeEswSsg>)

The Corporation runs the prison by paying contractors for things like food service, communications, laboratory services, and more.



These contractors then charge people detained **exorbitant rates for necessary services to survive being detained.**

That includes making phone calls, sending text messages, and buying **food to supplement insufficient nutrition.**

In the first two weeks of March, **20 people detained** reported to AMOR that **calls were too expensive.** AMOR received **new requests for Commissary help from 43 individuals** in the first two weeks of March alone.

Several people detained reported that it cost them **25 cents per minute** to make a call, even though on paper the cost should be 9 cents per minute.

- The Corporation contracted with Smart Communications in June 2024 and the Board affirmed the calls would cost people detained 9 cents per minute.
(Source: Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation Minutes, June 17, 2024, p.3)
- To receive funds to make these exorbitant payments, the company TouchPay takes a **cut of more than 10% of funds transferred** to people detained from their family and friends.

“ The calls are very expensive. They only give us 5 minutes every Monday and if for some reason it cuts off after a minute and you can't use the minutes any longer. The commissary is very expensive.

— Message received March 2025

”

The City of Central Falls wrote in a 2019 letter at the beginning of a the most recent ICE contract:

"The detention of these recent arrivals at the Wyatt beginning in March, 2019 is abhorrent to the ethos of the City, **a predominantly immigrant and first generation American city.** This is apparently yet another desperate attempt by the administration of the Corporation and the other special interests associated with the Wyatt designed to **put money in the pockets of bondholders.**"

(Source: Correspondence in response to threat of litigation letter involving UMB Bank and the Wyatt Detention Facilities Corporation, <https://www.centralfallsri.gov/legal/page/central-falls-wyatt-detention-facility-corporation>)

Testimonies of Hunger

“ The food they cook is not enough in size and sometimes I'm still hungry after I already ate, and not having money to buy snacks or order commissary makes life even harder in this place.

— Message received March 2025

”

- In the first two weeks of March, AMOR received messages from **16 people detained** by ICE who specified that they **would not have enough to eat** without help purchasing food from the Commissary.
- AMOR has received reports that the facility is often only serving food with pork and that people who are Muslim/don't eat pork have no other options and starve.

Testimonies of Racism and Arbitrary Punishment

“ They left us incommunicado for 2 weeks and **they lock us up when the lawyers are about to come**. Also when they (inmates) fight in another unit, even if it's not an immigration unit, they (staff) **lock us up and yell at us...** there is a lot of racism. I wanted to report that to a sergeant and he got to my cell when I wanted to tell him, **he closed the door on my face**.

— Message received March 2025

”

- In the first two weeks of March, six people detained detailed discrimination and four specifically described being **treated like animals**.
- AMOR received reports that the facility has been limiting people's access to the legal program by arbitrarily deciding who can and cannot attend.

What you can do!

“ I would like to ask for your help if you can help not only myself but others as well to make our voices heard, and support is really needed.

— Message received March 2025

”

- Let our allies know **we support them in their effort to remove ICE** from the Wyatt because of these abuses, and ask these allies to **use their voice to speak out** against what is happening right now in the Wyatt.
 - **Mayor Maria Rivera** of Central Falls
 - 401-727-7474
 - [Email Mayor Rivera](#)
 - **State Senator Jonathan Acosta** of Rhode Island District 16
 - 401-305-0545
 - sen-acosta@rilegislature.gov
 - **State Representative Karen Alzate** of Rhode Island District 60
 - (401) 663-5600
 - rep-alzate@rilegislature.gov
- Make calls and send emails to these **administrators at the Wyatt Detention Facility** to demand accountability and report these inhumane conditions:
 - **James J Lombardi III** Esq. CPA, Board President of the Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation
 - (401) 454-5900
 - **Annalisa Boucher**, Contact for the Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation
 - (401) 721-0313
 - aboucher@wyattdetention.com
- **Call and write to your Rhode Island State Representative and State Senator** and tell them you support **Senate Bill S-0295** and **House Bill HB-5724**.
 - Find out who your State Representative and State Senator are here: [Voter Information Center](#)
- Use this Report, as well as AMOR's [Testimony Toolkits](#), to prepare your **testimony** in support of these bills.
- Become a **monthly donor** to the AMOR [Community Fund for ICE Detainees](#)!
 - All funds go directly to folks detained by ICE at the Wyatt.
 - We are looking for **90 people** to pledge **40 dollars a month** to make the fund sustainable in order to continue supporting those inside!
 - If you can't pledge 40 dollars a month, do you know someone who can? Could you and three friends each give 10 dollars a month? Every bit helps!