

My name is Emma Kahn, and I am writing to express **my unequivocal support for House Bill 5724**, which would prohibit contracts with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and with private, for profit, prison facilities.

Last week, Alliance to Mobilize our Resistance (AMOR) issued a report based off of correspondence with more than 40 individuals detained by ICE at the Wyatt Detention Facility during March 2025. This report made abundantly clear: the Wyatt Detention Facility is rife with **medical neglect, financial exploitation, and torturous living conditions**. All of these findings mirror what I consistently hear as a volunteer for the Boston Immigration Justice Accompaniment Network. Every week, I speak with ICE detainees at Wyatt who tell me that **doctors will not listen to their pain**, that their **families are burdened by legal costs and emotional stress**, and that **the facility is unlivable**.

There has been an ongoing pattern over **many years of reports of medical neglect and unsanitary conditions** 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. Over the course of 2024, 12 medical staff left the facility, 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. It’s clear that ICE and their contractors are **bad at maintaining proper staff and care procedures**. AMOR heard from one detainee that: *“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.”*

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**. The Wyatt has a long history of neglect.

The Wyatt is run by the Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation. The City of Central Falls owns the land on which the prison sits. Yet, the Corporation **has paid nothing to the people of Central Falls** since 2021, either in taxes or other payments. This demonstrates that the presence of this detention center is **bad business for local residents** and the State of Rhode Island more broadly. No city should rely on prisons and detention centers as a form of economic development—especially given that the Wyatt is a **financial burden to the City of Central Falls**.

In fact, the City of Central Falls wrote in a 2019 letter at the beginning of the most recent ICE contract, saying “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.” The **people of Central Falls do not want the Wyatt Detention Center to hold ICE detainees**. ICE Detention fundamentally conflicts with the values of a community with a massive immigrant population. **This facility does not make our community safer. To the contrary-- it just makes people live in fear.**

Further, some of the facility’s third-party contractors charge detainees **exorbitant rates for services necessary to survive**. That includes making phone calls, sending text messages, and

buying food to supplement insufficient nutrition. This is despicable given the fact that most people detained at Wyatt are lower-income to begin with, and their detention often results in a **devastating loss of income for their families**. Particularly cruel here is the fact that when family and friends are able to deposit funds into detainees' commissary accounts for these expensive services—again, despite having lost a key source of income—the **third-party vendor TouchPay takes a cut of more than 10% of these deposited funds**. One detainee reported that *"I'm starting to believe that everything here wants money in exchange for happiness and freedom."*

All of this is made worse by the horrific food provisions. In the first two weeks of March, AMOR received messages from 16 people detained by ICE who specified that **they did not have enough to eat** and needed to purchase food from the Commissary (again, with extremely inflated prices). AMOR has also 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. The detainees with whom I have spoken have reported **physical ailments as a result of bad food**.

On top of all of this, detainees have reported **rampant discrimination and racism**. 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 in discriminatory ways.

Rhode Island must make clear: **ICE has no business detaining people here**. ICE has an **appalling record of abuse**. Many Americans are shocked to learn that in ICE detention centers people are deprived of their liberty, denied access to lawyers, separated from their families and loved ones, and subjected to severe medical neglect. The majority of people in detention **have been living in the U.S. for years**, have families here, and are established members of their communities. Many Wyatt detainees have **U.S. citizen kids who have been viciously separated from their parents**—worst of all, in their very backyard.

States across the country have passed legislation banning private prisons and detention centers. This has been shown to make municipal revenue more reliable and to generally strengthen communities. With the passage of this legislation RI can join other states in creating a community free of exploitative and inhumane immigration detention practices. I urge you to **pass House Bill 5724** to ban the use of state or local property for ICE Detention and terminate any existing contracts with ICE by July 2025.

Thank you,
Emma Kahn