

House Judiciary Committee
Chair, Representative Carol Hagan McEntee
CC: Clerk, Robbery DiMezza
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: End ICE Detention in RI (H 7436)

Dear Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is Jasmina de León Gill and I am the Lead Community Organizer with the Student Clinic for Immigrant Justice. I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed legislation (H 7436) to ban Intergovernmental Service Agreements (IGSAs) that permit Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to utilize Rhode Island's state and local resources for immigration detention. Enacting this legislation would align our state with others in taking a definitive stand against the inhumane and exploitative practice of immigration detention.

The Wyatt Detention Center, which describes itself as the first *publicly owned and privately operated* prison in the United States, has a long and shameful track record of human rights violations and abuses. In 2008, the Wyatt's original contract with ICE was terminated after **Hiu Lui Ng**, a man detained at the facility, died after staff ignored his symptoms of liver cancer. His suffering was exacerbated by medical neglect and inhumane treatment — a tragedy that brought national attention to the facility's failures.

In 2020, the **American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)** filed a class action lawsuit demanding the release of all individuals detained by ICE at Wyatt, citing unsanitary conditions and the facility's failure to protect people during the COVID-19 pandemic. That same year, 60 people launched a hunger strike to demand safer conditions and their release, only to be met with retaliation — phone access cut off and individuals placed in isolation.

Despite this disturbing history, **Invesco Ltd.** later invested in the Wyatt, reviving its ability to detain immigrants by reinstating ICE contracts — a move that allowed bondholders to profit off the suffering of detained individuals. This reestablishment of ICE operations was not about community safety or public interest; it was about restoring revenue for investors. The motivation was profit, plain and simple.

The financial burden of Wyatt has also deeply impacted the **City of Central Falls**. In 2019, **UMB Bank**, acting on behalf of Invesco and other bondholders, sued the City to seize control of the facility and install a court-appointed receiver. In addition to seeking \$130 million in damages, the lawsuit included measures intended to **silence the City's elected officials**, restricting them from speaking publicly or intervening in the operation of the facility, including expressing concerns about the inhumane treatment of detained individuals. This was a blatant attempt to suppress local government advocacy and free speech in service of protecting private profit.

Furthermore, no city should be forced to rely on prisons and detention centers as a form of economic development. The idea that cages for profit are a viable economic solution is not only morally bankrupt but has also proven financially unstable. Communities like Central Falls have been left to bear the brunt of fiscal mismanagement, bad-faith contracts, and reputational harm.

Rhode Island is home to a vibrant and diverse immigrant community. Many of our friends, neighbors, and loved ones have built their lives here and contribute to the social and economic fabric of our state. ICE detention centers tear families apart, isolate people from legal support and basic healthcare, and subject them to dehumanizing conditions. This is not who we are — and it's not the future we should accept.

Immigration detention is not a necessity, it is a choice. People navigating immigration proceedings should be able to do so within their communities, supported by family and community-based services, not locked behind bars in facilities operated for profit. The majority of people in detention have lived in the U.S. for years, have deep roots in their communities, and pose no danger to public safety.

The time to act is now. I urge you to support this critical legislation and ensure that Rhode Island is no longer complicit in ICE's abuses or in the exploitation of immigrant communities for financial gain. We must shut down the Wyatt's pathway to detention once and for all, and say clearly that our state will not be a factory for suffering.

Sincerely,



Jasmina de León Gill | Lead Community Organizer

Student Clinic for Immigrant Justice