



March 4th, 2026

House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

Testimony in Support of HB-7436

My name is Sophia Wright. I am submitting testimony on behalf of AMOR and on my own behalf as a Mental Health Counselor in training in support of Representative Giraldo's bill HB-7436 that would prohibit municipalities from maintaining or entering into contracts with ICE and withdrawing the use of state property for immigration detention.

The bill would require the Wyatt Detention Center to end its current relationship with ICE, which would benefit the entire community. AMOR advocates for a community without the criminalization of immigrants and inhumane detention practices.

This legislation is modeled off of laws that have already been implemented in other states: Illinois (2021), Colorado (2023), Oregon (1987/2021), Minnesota (2023), and Maryland (2021). And this year we aren't alone as New England states proposed bills to close their contracts/detention centers in New Hampshire, Massachusetts and New York.

The Wyatt Detention Center is a financial failure to the city.

In 1991, the nonprofit Central Falls Detention Facility Corporation (CFDFC) was created to pursue economic development for the City of Central Falls through the ownership of the Wyatt Detention Center. The federal government pays the Wyatt \$180/day per detainee, so there is an undue incentive by investors to maintain or increase the amount of people detained.

The Wyatt has had financial difficulties for years. For nearly two decades the Wyatt has failed to perform its founding purpose: to be a consistent source of income for the city of Central Falls.

The profits of the Wyatt were to be distributed first to pay for its operation, second to the bondholders, and third to the city of Central Falls. And it did so from 1993-2008 with a total of \$5.3 million in impact fees, but after ICE detainees were moved out of the Wyatt due to the death of Hiu Lui "Jason" Ng in 2008, regular payments to the city stopped and it went into receivership in 2009. During COVID the facility *received* tax-payer backed money intended for COVID relief, and it was used for payroll. Again due to the declining population of detainees during COVID, the Wyatt went through financial hardship and lost about \$25,000 a week.

Since the end of regular payments, the CFDFC's last payments to the City were in 2017 (\$133,000) and in 2021 (\$50,000). There have been no payments to the city since.

If a business or school replaced the Wyatt, not only would the city gain property taxes on that institution that it could use for social programs, but it would invite opportunity and investment to the city rather than being a symbol of abuse and cruelty.



A 2024 “Summary of Fiscal Impact” report valued the amount of taxes the Wyatt would have to pay at about \$1.1 million¹. House Bill 7461 asks for 27% of these taxes to be paid to the city of Central Falls (\$284,277), so looking at the past impact fees from 2017 and 2021: they are one-time mere fractions of what they could be bringing in for Central Falls. The presence of the Wyatt eliminates any amount of property taxes the city could earn with a business in its place.

There is no argument for the Wyatt being of economic value to the city of Central Falls and no amount of profit would excuse the existence of a prison known for perpetrating abuse and negligence over the years. **No city should rely on prisons and detention centers as a form of economic development.**

Moreover, the Wyatt leeches off of the funds of families who are experiencing their worst case scenarios. The Wyatt earns money both from the federal payment of \$180/day per detainee; through food, bottled water (\$2), clothes, and more that detainees buy through commissary; and through the cost of sending messages to family or lawyers (\$0.25 per message). One family reported putting a few hundred dollars into the wrong account for their loved one and they weren't able to get their money back.

Officials with the City of Central Falls are limited in how they can advocate for the rights of folks experiencing detention at the Wyatt.

The Wyatt stands today because of a lawsuit investors brought against the City of Central Falls. In 2019, the Wyatt Board reopened the ICE contract, 11 years after the first contract closed due to the death of an immigrant detainee from medical neglect: Hiu Lui “Jason” Ng. 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: “[...] 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 [...] 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 [sought] 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.”²

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, for example 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 and the Wyatt is only accountable to its bondholder, whose sole interest is maintaining the Wyatt open and filling beds, not the living conditions there.**

The Wyatt Detention Center has a gross history of medical neglect.

In 2008 Hiu Lui "Jason" Ng, a migrant in the process of getting his green card died in immense pain of liver cancer, and was found to have a broken spine, while detained at the facility due to

¹ [Fiscal Impact Report 2024](#)

² [The Museum Trustee Behind a \\$130 Million Lawsuit to Keep ICE Detainees in Prison | Hyperallergic](#)



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.

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 with retaliation by cutting off phone access and placing people in isolation.

The neglectful conditions at the Wyatt Detention Center is an ongoing, urgent issue. In 2025 and 2026, AMOR received reports about hunger and lack of special diets, which they are legally obligated to provide; reports of drinking water causing medical issues; medical neglect, which has resulted in the deterioration of existing medical conditions; theft of identification documents by ICE; harassment; and failure to provide access to legal resources. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests concerning official inspections about the Wyatt show deficiencies in many of these areas in recent years, confirming what we are seeing today. The Wyatt continues to demonstrate its inability to provide adequate and timely access to basic health care to folks in ICE detention and these conditions will continue until we demand transparent oversight and accountability from Wyatt staff or pass this bill. **Even if the conditions inside were perfect, immigrants should be able to await their court decisions from the safety of their home without surveillance, not in prison.**

Mental Health Affects of Detention

As a counselor in training it is also my responsibility to speak to the known negative consequences on folks in detention and their families living in the free world. Mental health professionals have found that "The nature of detention, which as noted often includes human rights violations, separation from family members, and the anticipation of permanent separation resulting from deportation and uncertainty regarding length, is regarded as a major contributing factor to mental deterioration, despondency, suicidality, anger, and frustration among detainees."³ Mental health professionals have long understood that stress occurs as a result of the perceived absence of control, predictability and social support⁴. When stress is perceived to present a danger to the self, and persists over long stretches of time and is extreme, the psychological impact can be extensive. The stress response activates the sympathetic nervous system, shutting down non-essential processes in the body like digestion, reproductive tasks, and even tasks in the body related with the immune system and healing⁵. When stress is chronic these impacts are compounded and result in a weakened immune system⁶. These

³ Brabeck, K. M., Lykes, M. B., & Hunter, C. (2014). The psychosocial impact of detention and deportation on U.S. migrant children and families. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 84(5), 496–505.

<https://doi-org.ric.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/ort0000011>

⁴ Sapolsky, R. M. (2015). Stress and the brain: individual variability and the inverted-U. *Nature Neuroscience*, 18(10), 1344–1346. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nn.4109>

⁵ Sapolsky, R. M., Lovett, M., Poole, R., Williams, L., Biondo, C., Stanford University, National Geographic Channel (Television station : Washington, D.C.), & National Geographic Television & Film. (2008). *Stress : portrait of a killer* (D. Klagsbrun, Ed.). National Geographic Television. <http://digital.films.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?xtid=42052>

⁶ Douthit, K. Z., & Russotti, J. (2017). Biology of marginality: A neurophysiological exploration of the social and cultural foundations of psychological health. In T. A. Field, L. K. Jones, & L. A. Russell-Chapin *Neurocounseling: Brain-based clinical approaches* (pp. 45-60). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.



responses can result in both psychological effects and the deterioration of physical health. Although many folks eventually will be free from ICE detention, in the absence of due process, and under the stress of not knowing when they will be free, stress is considered chronic and as a result everyone in ICE detention is predisposed to possible negative mental and physical health effects that may follow them for the rest of their lives. Families in our community whose loved ones have been detained at the Wyatt report stress and anxiety that touches their everyday lives. Please refer to AMOR's report attached that provides documentation on insufficient mental interventions for detainees experiencing suicidality while in detention at the Wyatt.

Response to a common critique.

A common critique is if this legislation passes, lawyers won't be able to release their clients on habeas corpus petitions because they will be transferred to Massachusetts.

Rhode Islanders at the Wyatt are already being transferred to Massachusetts, as well as to other states in New England and to the South in Texas and Louisiana. Even though ICE has about 110 contracted beds, AMOR has received reports from over 400 individuals, which illustrates that detainees are transferred frequently. It's not okay to hold people in these conditions just so long as they are not transferred elsewhere.

Not everyone has access to legal counsel to be able to petition for habeas corpus: detainees might not have the means or resources to contact a lawyer, and a report to AMOR explained that the phone number provided at the Wyatt for pro bono legal services does not work.

When we have the opportunity to get ICE out of detention centers, we must take it because that is our responsibility in Rhode Island on our route to abolishing ICE everywhere, from all spaces, including from detention centers. Contracting with ICE is not representative of Rhode Island or our values.

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.⁷ 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.** In fact, a 2019 poll showed that 98.4% of Central Falls residents had negative comments towards the Wyatt.⁸ 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. Nor should children be subject to the probability of trauma when witnessing the arrest of a classmate or family member.

Conclusion.

⁷ [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts - Population estimates, July 1, 2023. \(V2023\)](#)

⁸ [Community Safety Survey in Central Falls indicates 98.4 percent feel negatively towards the Wyatt](#)

*Illinois (2021), Colorado (2023), Oregon (1987/2021), Minnesota (2023), Maryland (2021), New Mexico (2026)



In the past year, we have watched members of our community taken off the streets, torn away from their families and subject to the Wyatt's inhumane practices in detention.

We don't want ICE on our streets, in our schools, churches, courthouses, or detention centers. Detention centers run by corporations and investors will inevitably prioritize profits over human rights and this does not represent our values in the state of Rhode Island.

We urge you to consider these points in support of Representative Giraldo's legislation HB-7436 that would prohibit municipalities from maintaining or entering into contracts with ICE and withdrawing the use of state property for immigration detention.

Sincerely,

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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."

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2. Central Falls Detention Center Facility Corporation Board of Directors Meeting Notes, 1/22/2024
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3. Watchdog Team: Swarovski Optik, Wyatt prison among R.I. recipients of PPP small business loans (providencejournal.com), 07/08/2020,
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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,
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