

PROHIBIT STATE/MUNICIPALITY CONTRACTS FOR CIVIL IMMIGRATION VIOLATION DETAINMENT

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INTRODUCTION

House Bill 7968 would prevent state and local governments from entering any contracts or agreements to detain individuals for federal civil immigration violations, and force these authorities to seek the termination of any existing contracts. ICE detention functions through a patchwork system of contracts, the vast majority of which are Intergovernmental Service Agreements. Through these contracts, ICE evades federal procurement law, and wastefully spends federal funds. Most importantly, this system has allowed ICE, local governments, private corporations, and detention center officials to evade accountability for egregious violations of human rights and dignity. We write this testimony to briefly outline the issues with ICE detention in Rhode Island and beyond, and to strongly express our support of the passage of House Bill No. 7968.

IMMIGRANT ABUSE & NEGLECT IN DETENTION CENTERS

This situation is a moral outrage. Reports obtained by the Project on Government Oversight outline experiences of sexual assault of immigrants, a lack of language accessibility, poor living conditions, and other issues raised by detainees while detained by ICE in detention centers across the country. Inadequate and unprepared medical care, insufficient mental health services, and cruel treatment of people with disabilities have also plagued the nationwide immigrant detention system.

In Rhode Island, the Wyatt Detention Center's Intergovernmental Service Agreement with ICE has put the lives of immigrant detainees at risk for years. The death of Hiu Lui Ng in 2008 due to abuse and medical neglect under ICE custody at the Wyatt Detention Center should have been a wake-up call, illustrating the dehumanizing conditions created by the continuation of Rhode Island's contract with ICE for civil immigration violations. Yet, ICE returned to the Wyatt Detention Center in 2019, later leading to a spike in ICE detainees during the COVID-19 pandemic that exacerbated health concerns.

PRECEDENCE FOR BANNING ICE IMMIGRANT DETAINMENT CONTRACTS

Across the country, states like New Jersey, California, Maryland, Oregon, and Washington have banned Intergovernmental Service Agreements to protect immigrant rights and dismantle immigrant detention, while others including Illinois, Maryland, and New York have taken steps to introduce immigration detention-banning legislation. To prevent further abuse and neglect of immigrants from occurring in the Wyatt Detention Center, Rhode Island must follow suit and ban state and municipal contracts with ICE for immigrant detainment.

This bill is a moral imperative for Rhode Island, and we look forward to seeing its passage.

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