

Greetings to the Senate Judiciary Committee,

I'm writing today in support of SB 2278, which aims to ban ICE detention from Rhode Island incarceration centers. I ask the committee to ensure that this bill is passed.

I am a Providence resident and a PhD candidate in Political Science at Northeastern University. My research focuses on human trafficking and broader forms of exploitation, including those that the state has a hand in brokering and profiting from.<sup>1</sup> My most recent project examines the political economy of migrant detention and its intersection with state-sponsored human trafficking.

The experiences of violence, abuse, and exploitation shared by those in detention centers across the U.S. are no surprise to anyone familiar with a rent-seeking model of detention, where quotas drive violent treatment and unlawful detainment, and fast expansion incentivizes cost-cutting measures and human rights violations. The Wyatt Detention Center is a prime example of this, where detainees have reported medical neglect, unsafe water leading to health issues, and sexual assault; where the management itself admits to incredibly high prices for basic necessities, like hygiene products, clean water, and communication with family; where one of our immigrant neighbors was killed due to medical neglect and the ICE contract terminated as a result; where detainees have conducted a hunger strike since restarting its migrant detention.<sup>2</sup> **These abuses are not aberrations within ICE's migrant detention model, they are features of a system designed to profit off the detainment of humans with little regard for the laws violated or the harm caused.**

For many years, ICE has continued to detain immigrants who have not violated any laws, many of whom are pursuing the required documentation. With the recent expansion of ICE quotas, the number of unlawfully detained persons is only increasing.<sup>3</sup> No person deserves to live in

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the intersection between migrant detention and human trafficking: Global Association of Human Trafficking Scholars, August 2025, "Migrant Detention in 2025- U.S. expansion and human rights violations" <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c41f647e2ccd1f0bd0e2bad/t/68b08a55ce7dcc5073b7438b/1756400213319/The+Intersection+of+Migrant+Detention+and+Human+Trafficking.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Steve Ahlquist News, March 2025, "AMOR Community Response Team: Report on ICE Detention at the Wyatt Detention Facility." <https://steveahlquist.substack.com/p/amor-community-response-team-report>. Sarah Betencourt, April 2020, "Immigrant detainees on hunger strike in RI" <https://commonwealthbeacon.org/criminal-justice/immigrant-detainees-on-hunger-strike-in-ri/>. ACLU RI, February 2009, "Rhode Island ACLU Files Lawsuit On Behalf Of Family Of Wyatt Center Detainee Who Died In Custody." <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/rhode-island-aclu-files-lawsuit-behalf-family-wyatt-center-detainee-who-died-custody>.

<sup>3</sup> Jasmine Garsd, July 2025, "Immigrants with no criminal convictions represent sharpest growth in ICE detention population." <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/03/nx-s1-5456246/immigrants-no-criminal-convictions-growth-ice-detention-population>.

David Bier, June 2025, "65 Percent of People Taken by ICE Had No Convictions, 93 Percent No Violent Convictions." <https://www.cato.org/blog/65-people-taken-ice-had-no-convictions-93-no-violent-convictions>. Ben Kellerman, February 2026, "ICE has detained a growing share of people with no criminal record or charge."

conditions like those at the Wyatt Detention Center, regardless of their history with the law, but this behavior by ICE is yet another demonstration of their agency's disregard for their own stated goals and for our federal and state laws. Several states have banned migrant detention centers altogether due to these issues. As ICE continues to expand its operations, it will target states that have accepted contracts with them and the violations that followed. Allowing this behavior to continue now paves the way for more human rights abuses in our facilities in the coming years.

I recently went to the meeting of the Central Falls Detention Management board that oversees the Wyatt Detention Center. Except for advocates bringing up the safety issues that detainees have been sharing about for years, the meeting focused entirely on the profit that the city stood to make off our neighbors' detainment. **No city budget decisions justify abuse, mistreatment, or unsafe conditions for any community.** Rhode Island should not be willing to engage in institutional violence for financial benefit.

**State-sponsored exploitation has no place in our state.** Tabling this bill for yet another year would signal to the people of Rhode Island and to federal agencies that our legislators are comfortable with mistreatment and unsafe circumstances at the Wyatt Detention Center and comfortable with ICE's unlawful and unethical behavior, so long as this violence is perpetrated against minority groups within our community. Detainees, advocates, scholars, and community members are asking you not to give your stamp of approval to this abuse in our state.

Rhode Island has a duty to keep state-sponsored exploitation and abuse out of its borders, and to challenge the federal mismanagement and unlawful activity that is attempting to normalize these human rights violations. I trust the committee will do their due diligence and pass SB 2278 this year.

Tatiana Rothchild