

# EVANGELICAL IMMIGRATION table.

Assemblies of God

April 13, 2020

Bethany Christian Services

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf  
Acting Secretary  
Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Council for Christian  
Colleges and Universities

Ethics and Religious  
Liberty Commission of the  
Southern Baptist  
Convention

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

In the midst of the many challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are writing out of concern for the wellbeing of both staff and detainees in immigrant detention facilities where ICE holds individuals with a pending court hearing. Our concern is rooted in our Christian belief that each human life is made in the image of God and thus precious, and, like you, we want to do everything possible to minimize the loss of life as a result of this pandemic.

Faith and Community  
Empowerment

National Association of  
Evangelicals

Individuals who are held in detention facilities, which often hold a large number of beds within a constrained space, are effectively unable to practice the “social distancing” advised by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to limit the spread the COVID-19. While it may be necessary to continue detaining individuals who have been convicted of violent crimes and who may pose a threat to public safety, ICE data obtained by Freedom of Information Act requests from Syracuse University suggest that, in recent months, the majority of individuals detained in ICE detention facilities [have not been convicted of any criminal offense](#), and many of those with criminal convictions are [for minor, non-violent offenses](#).

National Hispanic  
Christian Leadership  
Conference

The Wesleyan Church

World Relief

In the interest of public health – for these detainees, for the staff of these facilities and for the general public – we encourage you to utilize alternatives to detention for individuals who do not pose a threat to public safety. Detainees who are elderly or who may otherwise be uniquely vulnerable to the worst effects of COVID-19 are of particular concern.

Expanding the use of [alternatives to detention](#) would provide those individuals who must remain in detention with more space, limiting the public health threat to them and to staff who work in these facilities, while allowing those who can be safely released to reside with family members, friends or hosts from local churches. Alternatives to detention have proven highly effective in reducing the taxpayer expense of detention and assuring proper tracking of immigrants. We encourage you to partner with churches and community organizations to ensure that individuals who are released can find safe accommodations in which to “shelter in place” for as long as such practices are advised – and we pledge to

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encourage the many churches and ministries within our networks to provide any assistance they can.

We understand that, in some cases, vulnerable individuals have already been released from detention facilities, and we thank you for these prudent, compassionate decisions. We urge you to release others who remain detained but who do not pose a public safety threat.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this concern, and please know that we are praying for you and for the many staff under your leadership in the midst of this critical time.

Sincerely,

Scott Arbeiter, President, World Relief

Doug Clay, General Superintendent, Assemblies of God USA

Shirley V. Hoogstra, President, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

Hyepin Im, President & CEO, Faith and Community Empowerment

Walter Kim, President, National Association of Evangelicals

Jo Anne Lyon, Ambassador, General Superintendent Emerita, The Wesleyan Church

Russell Moore, President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

Chris Palusky, President & CEO, Bethany Christian Services

Samuel Rodriguez, President, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference