To: Los Angeles County Sheriff and Board of Supervisors  
From: Signatories  
Date: March 19, 2020  
Re: In Light of COVID-19, Immediately Stop the Transfers of Angelenos into the Custody of Federal Immigration Authorities and the Adelanto Immigration Prison

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and following the enclosed community letter to the Board of Supervisors, dated March 4, 2020 and signed by 100 organizations, we write today to urge you to immediately stop the transfers of Angelenos—who have already served their time and are due for release back to their homes and families—into the custody of federal immigration authorities and the Adelanto immigration prison. Specifically, following the action the City of Los Angeles has already taken, the County of Los Angeles should no longer facilitate the arrest of a person by federal immigration authorities, unless it is pursuant to a judicial probable cause determination for a criminal offense, or otherwise required by law.

Without effective public health intervention to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 200 million people nationally could be infected and 2.2 million people could die, crushing the nation’s medical system. Yet, despite Governor Gavin Newsom’s strict social distancing guidelines throughout California and stronger local measures in Los Angeles, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has continued business as usual, carrying out its increasingly aggressive and deceptive enforcement operations and further undermining Angelenos’ public safety and health. Worse, once ICE detains our community members, they are generally taken to the Adelanto immigration prison, where ICE has demonstrated an abject failure to provide adequate medical care even under “normal” circumstances. Moreover, just in the five-month period between October 1, 2019 and February 29, 2020, five individuals died in ICE custody.

The Adelanto immigration prison is a “congregate environment,” a place where people live and sleep in close proximity, where infectious diseases communicated by air or touch are more likely to spread. As a result, detained individuals will find it virtually impossible to engage in the social distancing and hygiene necessary to prevent and manage COVID-19, even with any best-laid plans. Further, lacking preventative measures, education, and meaningful access to proper health care is precisely the stage for a COVID-19 outbreak. As staff and ICE agents go back to their homes each night, a COVID-19 outbreak would affect not just detained individuals, but also the broader community. Thus, correctional public health experts and community organizations have urged the release from immigration custody of people most vulnerable to COVID-19. Logically, proactive public health measures also include ceasing the detention of additional county residents at the Adelanto immigration prison. For these very reasons, the Sheriff’s Department has taken initial steps to reduce the county jail population by slashing field arrests and releasing incarcerated individuals.

ICE, however, has taken no steps to reduce its detained population, exposing individuals to life-threatening incarceration. It has continued its enforcement operations. And rather than
exercise sound judgment and discretion to at a minimum release people vulnerable to COVID-19, ICE instead seems to have taken the position that it will not release anyone unless individuals present symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 or it is ordered to do so by a judge. This position is reckless and inhumane.

In this context, Los Angeles County should immediately stop the destructive—and potentially deadly—practice of handing over Angelenos into the custody of federal immigration authorities, which subjects our neighbors to further incarceration under life-threatening conditions at the Adelanto immigration prison. It is time for Los Angeles County, as the county with one of the richest and most diverse immigrant communities, to require federal immigration authorities to show judicial probable cause in order to access Sheriff’s Department jail facilities, stations, and courthouse lockups. In addition, Los Angeles County should urge federal immigration authorities to suspend enforcement operations and release detained individuals in order to combat the spread of COVID-19 and protect the public health of county residents.

**Signatories**

ACLU of Southern California
American Indian Movement – Southern California
Anti Recidivism Coalition (ARC)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles
Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council
Asociación Latino Musulmana de Norte América
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)
Black and Brown Clergy
Black Jewish Justice Alliance
Black Lives Matter – Los Angeles (BLM-LA)
Brothers, Sons, Selves
California Immigrant Policy Center (CIPC)
California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance (CYIJA)
Central American Resource Center – Los Angeles (CARECEN-LA)
Centro CSO
Clergy & Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE)
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Council on American-Islamic Relations – Los Angeles (CAIR-LA)

Community Coalition
Dignity and Power Now
Dolores Mission Catholic Church
Essie Justice Group
Esperanza Immigrants’ Rights Project
Food Empowerment Project
Freedom for Immigrants
Ground Game LA
Holman United Methodist Church
Homeboy Industries
Homies Unidos
Human Impact Partners (HIP)
Human Rights Watch
Iglesia Cristiana Centro de Vida Victoriosa
Ikar
Immigrant Defenders Law Center
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Immigration Resource Center of San Gabriel Valley
Indivisible
Instituto de Avance Latino (IDEAL)
JusticeLA
Khmer Girls in Action
Kol Tikvah Temple
Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA)

2 Office of the Chief of Police, Notice 1.14, “Immigration Enforcement Procedures” p. 5 (Dec. 29, 2017) (“Department personnel shall not permit US-ICE agents access to Department jail facilities to transfer arrestees except: To transfer custody pursuant to a judicial warrant or judicial probable cause determination for a criminal offense that authorizes a law enforcement officer to arrest and take into custody the individual for a federal criminal immigration offense . . . .”) (emphasis added).


Outbreaks of contagious diseases at immigration prisons have been devastating. For example, the 2019 outbreak of mumps in immigration prisons caused the hospitalization of dozens of people, the quarantine of hundreds, and it spread to many workers. See, e.g., Priscilla Alvarez, "5,200 people in ICE custody quarantined for exposure to mumps or chicken pox," CNN (June 14, 2019), https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/14/politics/mumps-chicken-pox-quarantine-ice/index.html. This outbreak was for a disease with an existing vaccine, and characteristics and contagiousness that were well understood. There is no way to predict the devastating consequences that a COVID-19 spread would have on the detained population—and the broader community—today.


9 See id.; Carcamo et al., supra, note 7.


14 Given that Guatemala and El Salvador have suspended all deportation flights from the United States, and Mexico may soon follow, there may be an increase in individuals detained after they are ordered removed, leading to further overcrowding at the Adelanto immigration prison. See Carcamo et al., supra, note 7; Reuters, "El Salvador Suspends Deportations From U.S., Mexico Over Coronavirus," N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 18, 2020), available at

15 On March 17, 2020, the Council of the City of New York submitted a letter to ICE calling for the suspension of immigration enforcement and the release of detainees in order to combat the spread of COVID-19 and protect the public health. See New York City Council Member Carlos Menchaca’s Tweet (Mar. 17, 2020, 10:33 am), https://twitter.com/NYCCouncil38/status/1239968044069212160.