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House resolution demands full investigation after ICE detention center visit

Georgia-based grassroots coalition leads whistleblower case that exposed forced sterilizations

The [work](#) of grassroots Southern organizers has fueled a victory for folks detained in ICE prisons.

On Friday, Oct. 2, the House of Representatives passed [Resolution 1153](#) condemning the medical abuse — reports of unwanted and unnecessary medical procedures, including forced sterilization of women — happening at the Irwin County Detention Center. It also calls on the Department of Homeland Security to pause the deportation of anyone who experienced any medical procedure at Irwin, hold the individuals involved in the procedures accountable, and to comply with all related investigations into the detention centers.

The resolution came just six days after 12 members of the House Judiciary Committee and Hispanic Caucus came to Georgia to hear directly from whistleblower Dawn Wooten what she witnessed and experienced as a nurse at Irwin. The next day, they visited Irwin to meet with immigrant women who also bravely shared their stories.

“To the women at the Irwin County Detention Center, those who have been released, and those who have been deported: you are brave and resilient. In passing this resolution, the United States Congress is saying that we see you, we hear you, and we will NOT stop fighting for you,” said [Rep. Pramila Jayapal](#) (WA) who initiated the resolution. [Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee](#) (TX), after hearing direct testimonies from the detained women at Irwin, declared: “What we have seen today cries out for help. No woman should have a gynecological procedure or any medical procedure without her permission. We need to fix this and fix it now.” We thank both of them as well as Rep. Hank Johnson (GA), Rep. Joaquin Castro (TX), Rep. Sylvia Garcia (TX), Rep. Lou Correa (CA), Rep. Nanette Barragán (CA), Rep. Adriano Espaillat (NY-16), Rep. Veronica Escobar (TX-16), Rep. Juan Vargas (CA-50), Rep. Jimmy Gomez (CA-34), and Raul Ruiz (CA-36) for urgently taking the concerns of detained folks from Ocilla, Georgia to the House floor.



The Congressional Delegation learned of human rights violations at the Irwin County Detention Center after Project South, the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights, Georgia Detention Watch, the South Georgia Immigrant Support Network — each with powerful on-the-ground work in communities across Georgia — filed a [complaint](#) with the DHS Office of Inspector General and LaSalle Corrections, a private corporation that runs the facility. We also sent [this letter](#) to Congress.

In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, there is no physical distancing and very little testing for detained folks. There is denial of medical treatment, and the shredding of medical documents. And, there is no protective gear for folks who work at Irwin — many like Nurse Wooten, who lives with sickle-cell disease, are especially vulnerable — worsening an already dire public health crisis.

From the lack of precautions and denial of testing and treatment for COVID-19, to unsanitary medical and living conditions and gynecological procedures being done without consent, we see these flagrant violations as a consequence of the deeply ingrained, historic systems of racial violence and exploitation in this country, rather than just violence inflicted by [one doctor](#). We recognize the connections between the violence of detention centers, the centuries of social control of Black bodies in the U.S. South, and this country's legacy of violence on Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Muslim, queer, trans, and all people of color.

Institutions like ICE and other conveyors of white supremacy, state violence, and xenophobia are irreparable, irredeemable, and completely irreverent. Simply removing people from Irwin and transferring them to another ICE prison, as the federal agency is doing now, is not acceptable. Such an ingrained system cannot be changed, only abolished.

Southern organizers have led the charge to shut down immigrant detention centers as part of our broader goal of abolishing the prison industrial complex, releasing detained immigrants, and people in jails and prisons, and fighting back against state surveillance.

As more reasons to #ShutDownIrwin surface, we urge Congress to act now to save lives and prevent further abuses.

OUR DEMANDS TO CONGRESS

On behalf of Project South, Georgia Detention Watch, Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights, and South Georgia Immigrant Support Network demand Congressional actions and interventions:

1) Shut Down Irwin immediately

- Suspend facility operations pending emergency review
- Pay damages in hazard back pay and severance to frontline employees



2) Immediately release and provide protection for all witnesses to medical abuse

- Release all witnesses from detention to be reunited with their family
- Demand that ICE fast-track and grant all requests for parole, stay of removals, release on humanitarian grounds, or exercise any other form of discretion within its powers to release individuals from detention
- Do not transfer any individual to other facilities; they should not be further separated from their loved ones
- Certify individuals coming forward as witnesses and create a protective class to prevent ICE and LaSalle Corrections officers from retaliating against individuals

3) Thorough, transparent Congressional investigations must begin immediately

- Investigation of all privately-run detention centers
- Investigation of all ICE detention centers
- Investigation of all local detention centers which have contracts with ICE
- Investigations must include opportunities for public comment
- Investigations must provide the community an opportunity to select the people who testify
- Investigations must include thorough review of DHS contracts with counties, with medical practitioners, general employment practices, and COVID endangerment
- Congress must provide in-language notice to all people in immigration detention of the open investigation by the Inspector General of DHS and any Congressional hearing into medical abuse in immigration detention centers

4) Immediate investigation of and accountability for medical harm committed

- Investigate contracts with non-board certified doctors
- Demand all medical records be made available to advisory board of medical professionals to review and assess for harm
- Initiate a process to return all harmed people to the United States
- Establish a public process to provide compensation to harmed women (including any woman who underwent procedure(s) without informed consent documented in their native language)
- Direct ICE to cooperate in any effort to certify witnesses having been harmed by the medical abuse to procure protections in accordance with the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000

Read more background on the whistleblower reports [HERE](#)

Take action with our organizing kit [HERE](#)

Read letters & messages from the women detained at Irwin [HERE](#) & [HERE](#)