

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 15, 2020

The Honorable Joseph V. Cuffari
Office of Inspector General
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, SW
Washington, DC 20528-0305

Dear Inspector General Cuffari:

I am writing to you regarding a horrific whistleblower complaint out of the Irwin County Detention Center detailing how the health and safety of immigrant detainees under U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody are being jeopardized. Specifically, these reports range from detainees not being given COVID-19 tests to female detainees being subject to hysterectomies at alarming rates.¹ I urge you to immediately investigate the allegations contained within the complaint and conduct a wider investigation of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) leadership to ascertain their knowledge and involvement in the alleged wrongdoing.

Yesterday, on Monday, September 14, 2020, several legal advocacy groups filed a whistleblower complaint on behalf of Dawn Wooten, a nurse employed at the Irwin County Detention Center.² The complaint alleges, among other things, “medical neglect . . . including the refusal to test detained immigrants for COVID-19 who have been exposed to the virus and are symptomatic, shredding of medical requests submitted by detained immigrants, and fabricating medical records.”³ Alarming, the complaint also raises serious concerns “regarding the rate at which hysterectomies are performed on immigrant women” at the Irwin County Detention Center.⁴

One immigrant detainee spoke to five different women at the facility who had hysterectomies between October 2019 and December 2019.⁵ The complaint further alleges that the women were confused as to why they needed the medical procedure. Ms. Wooten also confirmed that many of the women who received hysterectomies did not understand why the surgery was necessary. The

¹ Jerry Lambe, *‘Like an Experimental Concentration Camp’: Whistleblower Complaint Alleges Mass Hysterectomies at ICE Detention Center*, LAW & CRIME (Sept. 14, 2020), <https://lawandcrime.com/high-profile/like-an-experimental-concentration-camp-whistleblower-complaint-alleges-mass-hysterectomies-at-ice-detention-center/>.

² Project South, Institute for the Elimination of Poverty & Genocide, *Whistleblower Complaint Regarding Lack of Medical Care, Unsafe Work Practices, and Absence of Adequate Protection Against COVID-19 for Detained Immigrants and Employees Alike at the Irwin County Detention Center* (Sept. 14, 2020), *available at* <https://lawandcrime.com/high-profile/like-an-experimental-concentration-camp-whistleblower-complaint-alleges-mass-hysterectomies-at-ice-detention-center/>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Lambe, *supra* note 1.

whistleblower complaint notes how immigrant women were often given multiple different answers on why they needed the procedure and how non-Spanish speaking nurses obtained consent from the detainees “by simply googling Spanish.”⁶ One immigrant in the complaint said that she was not properly anesthetized and heard the doctor admit that he mistakenly removed the wrong ovary, resulting in her inability to have children.⁷

This whistleblower complaint is stunning and, if true, paints a disturbing picture at the Irwin County Detention Center. In a written statement, ICE has said that it “takes all allegations seriously and defers to OIG regarding any potential investigation and/or results.”⁸ Given the serious nature of the complaint, I urge your office to immediately conduct a thorough in-person investigation of the Irwin County Detention Center—including in-person interviews with relevant witnesses following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 guidance—and to further investigate DHS leaderships’ knowledge of the allegations as well as their possible involvement in the abuses. Furthermore, I urge you to commence an investigation into whether the alleged complaints at the Irwin County Detention Center have occurred at other detention centers throughout the country.

I appreciate your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*