



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on June 9, 2021

House Democrats Urge DHS, ICE to Refrain From Re-detaining Illegals

House Democrats on Wednesday called on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to not re-detain people previously in government detention who were released during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Representative Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.) led a group of [dozens](#) of lawmakers who [wrote](#) a letter to DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and ICE Acting Director Tae Johnson, urging them to let the released illegals be, since they “pose no danger” as the country is moving past the pandemic.



AP Images

The lawmakers start their letter with praising the agencies’ work “to curtail deportations,” and “roll back draconian interior enforcement measures.”

They cited government data noting that more than 16,000 detained migrants had contracted the virus in ICE custody, and that the prevalence in such facilities is 20 times greater than in the general public.

In response, the federal courts across the nation have ordered the release of thousands of migrants in light of the increased infection rate. The lawmakers praised ICE for following the courts’ orders, but said the agency should provide clearer guidance as to whether it intends on re-detaining those individuals as the number of cases across the nation continues to fall.

ICE could release many more individuals, including those who are medically vulnerable, as a matter of agency discretion.

It is believed that “the overwhelming majority of these individuals are now living safely at home with their families, with clear improvements to their health,” while “providing valuable support to their communities and loved ones, in compliance with the terms of their release, posing no danger to the community.”

Those people, however, Jaypal and her colleagues say, “continue to live with the constant fear of redetention by ICE.”

Therefore, the letter goes, “We respectfully request that DHS and ICE take prompt action to ensure that there is a clear policy regarding individuals who have been released from detention due to COVID-19, and that no one is re-detained solely as a result of our nation’s recovery from the pandemic. In addition, we request that DHS and ICE ensure that health and safety measures, releases from custody, and vaccination protocols are reviewed, improved, and enacted at detention facilities to ensure robust protections for those that remain detained.”

Today’s call to action was endorsed by national organizations including the American Civil Liberties Union, National Immigrant Justice Center, and Detention Watch Network, [according](#) to Jayapal.



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According to Detention Watch Network, in January, there were [15,415](#) people in immigration detention — the lowest number since 1999, which rose, as per ICE, to [21,519](#) people in May, 14,885 of whom were expeditiously removed, and 4,993 got a Notice to Appear ([NTA](#)).

At the same time, the DHS's [2021 budget](#) includes \$3.1 billion for a total of 60,000 detention beds — *three times* more than those detained to date, of which 5,000 beds are reserved for family units, which should “ensure apprehended aliens subject to removal from the United States are detained in safe and secure facilities pending their removal.”

Many Democrats push to shut down ICE detention facilities amid a surge of the migrants coming to the U.S. through its southern border.

In the end of May, DHS [announced](#) the closures of the C. Carlos Carreiro Immigration Detention Center in North Dartmouth, Massachusetts, and the Irwin County Detention Center in Ocilla, Georgia.

Jayapal [said](#) she was instrumental in getting the Biden administration to shut down a Georgia immigration detention center.

“Well, this is a really, really big step forward,” Jayapal said. “I was the first person to start speaking out on the Irwin Detention Center and calling for it to be closed down.”

At the time, Jayapal said she believed the closing of the center would start a trend to shut down all for-profit immigration detention centers, saying the illegal immigrants “don’t need to be in there,” but “we can have them in public facilities that have real accountability.”

Not even a year ago, then-candidate Joe Biden [supported](#) an idea of closing the detention centers. When asked at a campaign stop in Rock Hill, South Carolina, how he would improve migrant detention centers, he replied, “Close them down.... By the way, we don’t need them!”

Biden went on to cite his experience in the Obama administration, saying the centers were unnecessary because “we kind of said, if you had said you have to report back for a hearing on such and such a date, people show up.”

A Biden spokesperson later clarified his comments, noting that the former vice president proposed closing only “for-profit” detention centers.

In January, Biden signed an executive [order](#) instructing the Department of Justice to end its contracts with private prisons, but the order did not apply to the DHS, which uses private detention centers for illegal immigrants.



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