

April 2nd, 2021

The Honorable Carlos Gimenez
419 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Gimenez,

We are writing to you as students on behalf of Dr. Annie Watson's International Human Rights class at the University of Florida. Throughout the course of this semester, we have been introduced to a number of global human rights issues, and as such, we are motivated to bring awareness to the protection of human rights and to address the injustices that may occur in our own backyard.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about no shortage of challenges for our nation, and particularly for the state of Florida. As reported by the [American Bar Association](#) in December of 2020, "there are currently 7,622 individuals who are or were in ICE custody and who have tested positive for COVID-19 since testing began in February 2020." Immigrant detainees are about [2.9 times more likely](#) to test positive for coronavirus than the general U.S. public. Further, ICE has failed to provide accurate public records of COVID-19 cases within its facilities—ICE has [removed the names](#) of several facilities with previously confirmed cases from its COVID-19 webpage with no explanation. Characterized by overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and inadequate medical care, immigrant detention facilities have become hotbeds for the spread of COVID-19.

Miami is the metropolitan area with the [5th-highest](#) undocumented immigrant population in the United States, which contributes to the high number of detainees in Florida's immigrant detention centers. In Florida, these facilities have failed to uphold the national standards set in place by the Department of Homeland Security. In a time where immigration has become more prevalent than ever before, it is the job of our representatives to ensure a safe transition for immigrants during their naturalization process.

We urge your support of the Senate bill [S.328 - Federal Correctional Facilities COVID-19 Response Act](#) upon its arrival in the House of Representatives. This bill would allow for COVID-19 vaccinations and testing in ICE facilities at no cost to the incarcerated persons. Employees of these facilities would also have access to COVID-19 testing and vaccinations, as well as paid administrative leave in the case of a positive result. These procedures represent a step in a positive direction toward slowing the spread of COVID-19 within immigrant detention facilities, where detainees are already at risk for coronavirus and other health concerns.

As a ranking member of the Committee of Homeland Security, your awareness of these pressing issues is very valuable. It is our goal to bring your attention to the injustices occurring within detention centers in your home district and beyond, and urge your support for reform that could potentially benefit individuals in these facilities. We appreciate the work you have done for your home district and for our state and hope to have your support on this critical issue.

Sincerely,
Victoria Puerto, William Parker, Marcos Izquierdo, Arianna Sabato