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Congress of the United States
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June 6, 2018

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Filemon Vela
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Border & Maritime Security
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Immigration & Border Security
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Ranking Members:

I write on behalf of my constituents to express my strongest concern over immigration enforcement, detention, and court proceedings in Metro Atlanta – among the worst places in America to be undocumented. Recent developments call for increased congressional oversight and legislation. If we fail to act, Georgia could become an unfortunate model for authorities to emulate across the country.

Congress must investigate and cease the targeting of immigrant communities through traffic stops, workplace sweeps, stakeouts, and other forms of intimidation. Arrests of immigrants without criminal records have more than quadrupled in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.¹ Seventeen state and local police forces in this area participate in the 287(g) program², and Gwinnett County, Georgia, accounts for more than one-fifth of all 287(g) arrests nationwide.³ This trend magnifies fear and distrust in immigrant communities, households, and schools and prevents local police from building trust with the communities they serve.

In addition, Congress must end an unjust detention system that sends immigrants far from their families and friends, subordinates their well-being to the profit of others, and strips them of their rights. While the publicly operated Atlanta City Detention Center is located in my congressional district, two of the most notorious ICE facilities in the country, Stewart and Irwin Detention Centers, are located in South Georgia and operated by private contractors. Our nation's detention system should comply with universal high standards, and there should be no disparity or question in respecting the human dignity and worth of any person.

¹ Rose, J., 2018. How Metro Atlanta Became A 'Pioneer' Of Immigration Enforcement. *NPR*. Available at: <http://www.npr.org/2018/02/13/585301595/why-atlanta-embraces-trump-administrations-immigration-crackdown>.

² U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2018. Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act. *ICE*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2IE8hIk> [Accessed May 14, 2018].

³ Rose.

Furthermore, Congress must safeguard living and working conditions for detained immigrants that honor their dignity and worth. In Georgia, advocacy groups investigated both Stewart and Irwin and found extensive due process issues, inhumane treatment and living conditions, inadequate health care, civil rights violations, and involuntary labor practices.⁴ The Department of Homeland Security's Inspector General echoed these findings.⁵ In April, three Stewart detainees filed a Federal lawsuit alleging forced labor for wages as low as one dollar per day, which violates Federal and State labor laws.⁷ These practices may also violate the 13th Amendment.

I strongly believe that Congress must review and reform court protocols that compromise justice for immigrants. One of the nation's harshest immigration courts is located in Atlanta.⁸ This court grants just two percent of asylum requests – the lowest rate in the country⁹ – and approves deportation relief at lower than average rates.¹⁰ The Southern Poverty Law Center reported numerous violations in the Atlanta court of immigration court standards, which include examples of prejudice or disinterest, lack of professionalism, referrals to detainees as “prisoners”, and inadequate interpretation.¹¹ This makes it nearly impossible for immigrants to seek and obtain true justice.

As you know, I share your commitments to ensuring that the Federal government protects, secures, and works in the best interests of the most vulnerable – especially children and young people. The administration's inhumane policy of separating children from parents and detaining them for extended periods is a tactic unworthy of a nation dedicated to the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Likewise, its actions relating to Dreamers, Temporary Protected Status recipients, refugees, and others demonstrate an alarming and arbitrary cruelty in the name of security. Congress must end these abuses and work to lift people up, not push them down.

The United States' immigration system should reflect our nation's commitment to justice, decency, and human rights. Each of you recognizes that this administration persistently dehumanizes women, men, and children at every stage of our immigration system. This relentless assault undermines our country's legacy, promise, and moral leadership. It is unworthy of a civilized nation built by and for immigrants. Congress must investigate these wanton abuses of power and act to resolve these moral and humanitarian crises.

⁴ Project South, 2017. *Imprisoned Justice: Inside Two Georgia Immigrant Detention Centers*. Available at: http://www.projectsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Imprisoned_Justice_Report-1.pdf.

⁵ Office of the Inspector General, 2017. *Concerns about ICE Detainee Treatment and Care at Detention Facilities*. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Available at: <http://bit.ly/2L13wqP>.

⁶ Yu, E., 2018. Exclusive: An ICE Detention Center's Struggle With 'Chronic' Staff Shortages. *90.1 FM WABE*. Available at: <http://www.wabe.org/exclusive-an-ice-detention-centers-struggle-with-chronic-staff-shortages/>

⁷ Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018. SPLC Sues Private Prison Company That Uses Forced Labor of Detained Immigrants in Georgia to Boost Profits. *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Available at: <http://bit.ly/2IfrtNc>.

⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2008. *U.S. Asylum System: Significant Variation Existed in Asylum Outcomes across Immigration Courts and Judges*. U.S. GAO. Available at: <http://bit.ly/2If1Yv0>.

⁹ Executive Office of Immigration Review, 2017. *FY 2016 Statistics Yearbook*. U.S. Department of Justice. Available at: <http://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/fysb16/download>.

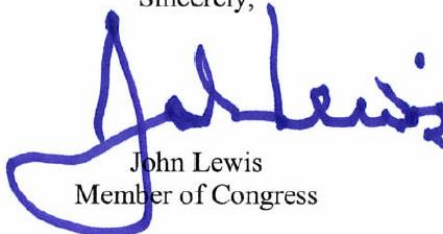
¹⁰ Foley, E. Here's Why Atlanta Is One Of The Worst Places To Be An Undocumented Immigrant. *The Huffington Post*. Available at: <http://bit.ly/1YYJBsy>.

¹¹ Ludsin, H., Graybill, L. & Cho, E., 2017. Observations of Atlanta Immigration Court. *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Available at: http://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/2017-atl_complaint_letter_final.pdf.

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As always, I thank you for your service and leadership on these issues during these challenging times, and I appreciate your consideration of my views and the concerns of my constituents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Lewis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a small dot at the end.

John Lewis
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Richard Neal, Ranking Member, House Ways and Means Committee
The Honorable Danny K. Davis, Ranking Member, Human Resources Subcommittee, House Ways
and Means Committee