

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Chad Wolf  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington DC 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Chad Wolf,

We represent and advocate for survivors of intimate partner violence across New York, and write to express our shared belief that ICE puts everyone's lives at risk by continuing its harmful raids, arrests, and detentions during the COVID-19 crisis. We are extremely concerned that ICE is continuing its arrest operations at a time when many across the nation are confined to their homes. In addition, we do not feel that it is responsible for ICE to introduce people into detention facilities or continue to jeopardize the health of people in ICE detention. The Wednesday [announcement](#) that ICE will temporarily target those posing "public safety risks" and subject to mandatory detention on criminal grounds does nothing to mitigate these dangers.

As service providers and advocates, we have seen firsthand how ICE raids hurt survivors, exacerbated now by COVID-19. By discouraging survivors' participation in courts and governmental agencies, ICE raids make the people we serve LESS SAFE. Many survivors are hesitant to call the police because of the high likelihood that contact with the criminal justice system will trigger ICE enforcement. Furthermore, the fact that ICE agents often wear "police" vests and pretend they are local police has a direct [chilling effect](#) on survivors, reinforcing their fear that local police are an extension of immigration policing. Also, ICE courthouse arrests have had a well-documented chilling effect on survivors. On March 16, in an area with documented cases of coronavirus, ICE arrested an individual leaving a Long Island courthouse after he appeared for domestic violence-related charges. These arrests only create more fear amongst survivors, who now must choose between inaction and calling the police and risking that a partner or co-parent will be put into ICE detention (where the likelihood of contracting the virus is much higher). The fact that ICE detainees announced a [hunger strike](#) this week because they fear dying in detention facilities with poor health and sanitary conditions only underscores the urgency of the moment.

Further, ICE arrests of individuals with domestic violence-related charges subject everyone in the home to ICE agents coming to their door, bringing unknown contagions to their door. There is simply no question that survivors will be driven further into the shadows by continued ICE raids of their homes and arrests of their family members, particularly during these times of uncertainty and fear.

In addition, your agency's promise not to carry out enforcement operations at health care facilities fails to account for shelters, where many survivors live with their family members, or courts, where survivors often go to serve as witnesses and parties. We implore you to end ICE's practice of conducting raids and to release individuals from detention so that our clients' family members can best protect themselves during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Lastly, we fundamentally disagree with the premise that targeting people with criminal arrest or convictions is a legitimate solution to intimate partner violence in our communities or protects "public safety."

Signed,

African Services Committee  
Bronx Immigration Partnership  
Center for Safety and Change  
Central American Legal Assistance  
Day One  
Immigrant Defense Project  
Immigrant Justice Corps  
Her Justice  
Lawyers for Children  
Legal Aid Society of New York City  
Legal Aid Society of Westchester  
Legal Services NYC  
Make the Road New York  
My Sisters' Place  
New Sanctuary Coalition  
New York City Anti-Violence Project  
New York Immigration Coalition  
New York Legal Assistance Group  
Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC)  
Safe Horizon  
Sanctuary for Families  
Sauti Yetu Center for African Women and Families  
UnLocal, Inc.  
Violence Intervention Program, Inc.