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Subject: Severe Carbon Monoxide Poisoning at Glades County Detention Center

On Tuesday, November 23, 2021, a carbon monoxide buildup in the kitchen at the Glades County Detention Center (“Glades”) resulted in the poisoning of nine people who were working in the kitchen: six detained individuals and three Glades staff members. Of these, four detained men and one female Glades staff member were hospitalized at Hendry Regional Medical Center, and two of the hospitalized men subsequently had to be airlifted from Hendry Regional Medical Center to AdventHealth hospital in Orlando because exposure to the gas caused such dire symptoms. The other two detained individuals and two Glades staff members who were exposed to the gas experienced symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, including headaches, dizziness, and shortness of breath, but were not taken to the hospital that day. They were administered supplemental oxygen by the medical staff at Glades. Their condition is serious and continues to be monitored. In fact, on December 3, one detained man who was affected was told by medical staff that he would soon be taken to the hospital to have the level of carbon monoxide in his blood checked through additional blood work, even though he had not been hospitalized on November 23rd.

The detained kitchen workers who were not taken to the hospital on November 23rd were forced to remain in the kitchen, where the poisonous gas was presumably still building up, until they had finished serving lunch for the facility. It was not until they were cleaning up that a lieutenant told them to stop everything and leave the area. When they were finally told to stop working, they were taken to medical, had their vitals checked, and received oxygen for about thirty minutes. After being permitted to rest briefly, the detained kitchen workers were sent back to the kitchen for their shift that evening, even though Duane Pottorff, chief deputy for the Glades County Sheriff's Office, says the area was not cleared by the fire marshall until the next day.¹ In fact, detained individuals say they never saw anyone from the fire department arrive at Glades, and were told that the Glades staff “sprayed something” to make the area safe.

Ramie Douglas (A#079 938 832) was working in the barbershop, which is near the kitchen, at the time of the incident and reported that he also experienced symptoms of carbon monoxide exposure, which included feeling light headed, dizzy, and nauseous. In response, the medical staff only provided him with ibuprofen, and about a week later, he was transferred to Krome Service Processing Center (“Krome”). He is now receiving breathing treatments and continues to feel nauseous weeks after the incident. Had the fumes spread further, the entire population of the jail—about 168 people at the time, including 84 in ICE custody—could have been at risk, as could the entire staff of the jail. Indeed, it is entirely possible that more people were affected at the time.

Two weeks after the carbon monoxide poisoning occurred, many of the affected individuals report continuing to experience symptoms of the poisoning and have received little to no medical treatment for these ongoing medical issues. Renardo Phipps (A#216 678 321), who is from Jamaica and has high blood pressure, was hospitalized at the Hendry Regional Medical Center and subsequently transferred to Krome on or about November 24, 2021. At Hendry Regional Medical Center, he was placed on supplemental oxygen for approximately six to seven hours. When he returned to Glades on November 23rd in the evening, he was forced to sleep in a cell in the processing area of the detention center. At about five a.m., Mr. Phipps was told he would be transferred to Krome. After he arrived at Krome, he was never placed in medical observation in the medical housing unit; officials simply sent him to general population. No bloodwork has been conducted since his hospitalization on November 23, 2021 to further monitor his progress after the carbon monoxide exposure. On December 6, 2021, he reported that he continues to have headaches, experience dizziness, and feel fatigued. He put in a sick call request on December 5th but had not been called to medical.

¹ Joshua Ceballos, *Detainees Hospitalized for Carbon Monoxide Poisoning at Glades Detention Center*, Miami New Times (Nov. 30, 2021), <https://www.miaminewtimes.com/news/glades-county-detention-center-carbon-monoxide-exposure-13425720>.

Rollin Manning (A#215 951 402), who is also from Jamaica and has chronic asthma, was airlifted to an Orlando area hospital after he fainted due to the carbon monoxide poisoning. Mr. Manning reported that he was washing trays when he began to feel nauseous and have a headache. He reported his symptoms to a kitchen staff member and an officer. As his symptoms worsened, he asked Glades staff to bring his inhaler. By the time he was brought the inhaler, Mr. Manning explains that it was too late – his heart was racing, he was sweating, his blood pressure was rising, and he could not breathe. He explains that he passed out and was taken to the jail’s medical unit. He was then taken in an ambulance to Hendry Regional Medical Center and subsequently airlifted to an Orlando area hospital. He remembers vomiting at the hospital, being placed on an IV, and being given supplemental oxygen. Once discharged from the hospital, he was taken to an ICE office in the Orlando area. He was then transferred to Krome where he arrived at about three in the morning on November 25, 2021. At Krome, he was placed in solitary confinement while the results of his COVID-19 test were pending and then assigned to a general population housing unit; Mr. Manning was never permitted to remain in medical observation despite his ongoing symptoms from the carbon monoxide poisoning.

Now detained at Krome, Mr. Manning is experiencing significant symptoms related to the exposure to carbon monoxide, including weakness, fatigue, nausea, constant headaches, dizziness, confusion and memory issues, and constant vomiting. Yet medical staff at Krome have only provided him with ibuprofen and have ignored his ongoing symptoms of the CO poisoning. We remain extremely concerned for his wellbeing and health, particularly given the ongoing medical neglect he is experiencing at Krome.

GCSO endangered these lives and failed to prevent the events of November 23rd when they neglected to install a carbon monoxide detector² in an area where the gas could easily build up. Reportedly, all it took to trigger this event was for a Glades County staff member to forget to turn on the ventilation system. Moreover, GCSO’s mishandling of the carbon monoxide buildup shows a complete disregard for detained individual’s lives and an utter lack of knowledge of safety protocols. It raises questions about whether appropriate evacuation protocols are in place in the facility and whether they would be followed properly in the event of other emergencies.

Despite these life-threatening events, ICE allows Glades to continue operating with very little oversight. This incident is merely the latest in a pattern of neglect, incompetence, abuse, and systemic inhumanity at Glades. If this pattern continues, it is only a matter of time before the next life-threatening event at Glades, yet ICE does little or nothing to intervene. As of December 6, no one from ICE had spoken to the detained men and women about the incident, nor were they given any paperwork such as an incident report. Moreover, ICE is not only continuing its contract with this unsafe facility, it has contracted with the GCSO to pay for a guaranteed minimum of 300 beds through March 2022, even though only around 60 people are currently in

² *Id.*

ICE custody there as of December 3. Taxpayers should not be paying for a facility that is at one-fifth capacity and that routinely endangers the lives of those detained there.

Therefore, the following organizations—Immigrant Action Alliance, Americans for Immigrant Justice, Doctors for Camp Closure, Freedom for Immigrants, Detention Watch Network, Southern Poverty Law Center, HOPE Community Center of Apopka, FL, and Borderless Existence Initiative—raise these issues for you to take immediate action.

We raise this to ICE and DHS leadership because ICE must continue to systematically evaluate the quality of care at each facility and move to terminate contracts with facilities that fail to meet basic standards of care. Glades stands out as such a facility. The 2019 National Detention Standards for Non-dedicated Facilities (“NDS”) protect “detainees, staff, volunteers, and contractors from injury and illness by maintaining high facility standards of cleanliness and sanitation, *safe work practices*, and control of hazardous substances and equipment.”³ Events such as those that occurred on November 23 show that the facility is incapable of maintaining a safe environment.

We also raise this to OSHA because the NDS stipulates that facilities like Glades will “operate in accordance with all applicable regulations and codes, such as those of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).” To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, **OSHA states** that workplaces should install and regularly check ventilation systems, maintain potentially CO-producing equipment in good working order, and “**provide personal CO monitors with audible alarms if potential exposure to CO exists.**” No such audible alarm existed in the affected area until after the event. The equipment failure also calls into question the steps the facility is taking to follow safe practices for inspecting equipment and ventilation.

Furthermore, OSHA states that workers should be educated “about the sources and conditions that may result in CO poisoning as well as the symptoms and control of CO exposure.” As neither the detained kitchen workers nor the jail kitchen staff were aware that their symptoms could indicate carbon monoxide poisoning, it appears that an essential educational step was missing or grossly inadequate.⁴

Furthermore, Glades failed to follow proper evacuation procedures at the time of the event. Pursuant to 29 CFR Part 1917.24(a), “employees shall be removed from the enclosed space if the carbon monoxide concentration exceeds a ceiling of 100 ppm (0.01%).”⁵ The OSHA blog states

³ 2019 National Detention Standards for Non-Dedicated Facilities, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement at 1.1 Section I, <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/detention-standards/2019/nds2019.pdf>.

⁴ *OSHA Fact Sheet, Carbon Monoxide Poisoning*, <https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/carbonmonoxide-factsheet.pdf>

⁵ *OSHA Carbon Monoxide Standard, 29 CFR Part 1917.24(a)* <https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1917/1917.24>

that once “the level of carbon monoxide reaches 150-200 parts per million,” the gas “can cause serious complications including disorientation, unconsciousness, and death.”⁶ Although the carbon monoxide concentration at the time of the event is unknown, it is very likely that it reached or exceeded 150 ppm given that two people in the area were rendered unconscious. Yet rather than clearing all people from the enclosed space at that point, GSCO forced them to continue working. When they returned for the evening shift, they received no assurance or proof that carbon monoxide levels had abated. As stated above, Glades’ failure to appropriately move people from the affected area raises questions about whether appropriate evacuation protocols are in place in the facility and whether they would be followed properly in the event of other emergencies.

We also raise this to the Florida Department of Health and the Glades County Department of Health because of the lasting health consequences the events of November 23 will have for all who were impacted. It is unconscionable to continue operating a facility that has put people’s lives at risk in the manner described above, and to continue to imprison those whose health has been permanently harmed due to the negligence of the Glades County Detention Center and we urge you to recommend their immediate release.

Lastly, we raise this to the **Glades County Board of Commissioners** because it is in their power to end the ICE contract. Glades County is a party to the Intergovernmental Service Agreement with ICE, with the Sheriff signing the contract on the county’s behalf. The IGSA clearly states that the IGSA can be terminated in writing, by either party and that “either party must provide written notice of intentions to terminate the agreement, 60 days in advance of the effective date of formal termination.” The commissioners would be well advised to terminate this contract given that Glades County would be liable in the case of wrongful death suits and personal injury suits. The county continues to make this gamble in the face of continued injuries, illnesses, fatalities, and near fatalities at their county’s detention center—a questionable use of their constituents’ tax dollars and a stain on their beautiful county.

Because of this entirely preventable yet nearly fatal catastrophe at Glades, we urge you to:

- **End the contract** between ICE and Glades County immediately, if it is in your power to do so, or to do all you can to recommend the immediate closure of this dangerous facility.
- **Immediately release**—or recommend the release of— all six of the detained kitchen workers poisoned by carbon monoxide. Glades’s negligence has undoubtedly inflicted permanent health consequences on these six individuals. Even when it is not fatal, carbon monoxide inhalation can cause permanent brain damage and heart damage. Those exposed to the fumes will likely suffer severe health consequences for the rest of their

⁶ Bradley Stevens, *OSHA Guidelines Address Carbon Monoxide Exposure*, OSHA Regulations Blog (March 6, 2019), <https://osharegulationsblog.com/osha-guidelines-address-carbon-monoxide-exposure/>

lives due to the actions of the Glades County Sheriff's Office. In its failure to prevent this disaster, and in continuing to expose detained individuals to the deadly gas after they began showing symptoms, the Glades County Sheriff's Office recklessly endangered their lives.

We urge all those with oversight to take these actions immediately.

Sincerely,



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