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For Immediate Release

California Workplace Safety Agency Asks Feds to Allow Detained Immigrant Workers to Stay in the U.S. During Investigation of Golden State Annex ICE Detention Center

“Cal/OSHA cannot fulfill its mission without the invaluable cooperation and trust of immigrant workers.”

Oakland, CA – Late last month, the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) sent a groundbreaking [letter](#) to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) asking the federal immigration agency to grant at least two years of protection from deportation for seven immigrants. The individuals are key witnesses in an [ongoing case](#) investigating the private prison company GEO Group (GEO) for workplace violations that endangered detained immigrant workers at Golden State Annex (GSA), a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility in McFarland, California. The workers are represented by The California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice, Immigrant Defense Advocates, and Worksafe.

This is likely the first time that any state OSHA agency nationwide has issued a Statement of Interest for detained immigrant workers in the course of investigating ICE detention center workplace violations.

The seven individuals filed a complaint with Cal/OSHA in 2022 while working for GEO as detained immigrants at GSA. ICE has already deported one of the individuals since then. The workers performed essential cleaning and other duties in 8-hour shifts in unsafe conditions, for which they were paid only \$1 per day, an additional injustice that led dozens of them to launch a [labor strike](#) and [sue the company](#). Cal/OSHA ultimately [fined](#) GEO over \$100,000 for violations including “willful” failure to maintain “effective written procedures to reduce employee risk of exposure to aerosol transmissible disease.” There have been multiple COVID-19 outbreaks at the facility, both before and after the penalty was issued.

“We applaud Cal/OSHA for defending these serious citations with participation from the worker-detainees who filed the complaint. These workers experienced actual harm, serious illness, from Geo’s failure to implement COVID-19 measures, and they can testify to that,” said **Karín Umfrey, Senior Attorney at Worksafe**.

“By issuing this letter, Cal/OSHA recognized what detained workers have long said: they cannot be safe from retaliation in detention,” said **Mariel Villarreal, Senior Attorney with the California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice**. “We call on ICE to end the contract with GEO and shut down the Golden State Annex detention center.”

There are currently [over 37,000](#) immigrants in ICE detention, [thousands](#) of whom are made to work inside those detention centers at any given time. In 2021, California-based immigrant justice organizations

supported the passage of [AB 263](#), which clarified that privately operated immigrant detention centers in the state must comply with all local or state public health orders and occupational health and safety regulations, including those enforced by Cal/OSHA. Years of [public pressure](#) from immigrant justice groups led to the [establishment](#) in 2023 of a streamlined government process for using prosecutorial discretion to grant deferred action – protection from deportation – and work authorization to immigrant workers who report abuses in the workplace.

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The [California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice](#) (CCIJ) is dedicated to building collective power to end immigrant detention. CCIJ utilizes coordination, advocacy, and legal services to fight for the liberation of immigrants in California.

[Immigrant Defense Advocates](#) (IDA) works hand in hand with the immigrant community to synthesize community organizing with legal services, advocacy with policy, and above all focuses on empowerment over panic.

[Worksafe](#) is a California-based organization dedicated to promoting and protecting the basic right of all people to a safe and healthy workplace.