

#FREEEDC

Artwork by Serges Demefack

#FREEEDC #ABOLISHICE #FREETHEMALL

ORGANIZING TOOLKIT

TOGETHER, WE CAN FREE THEM ALL

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A Call to Action

Calling our partners on the frontlines of racial justice, immigrant and refugee rights, worker's rights, and prisoner's rights.

Calling our partners who are part of the #FreeThemAll, #AbolishICE, #DefundPolice campaigns, who are answering the call our incarcerated and detained family and friends have demanded of us.

Calling all people who are looking to support and shed light on the injustices happening: this is the moment where we can join forces to demand the end of systems that criminalize and perpetuate violence against Black and Brown people, immigrants and refugees, queer, trans, Latinx, Indigenous, Muslim and exploited people of color.

The last several years have spotlighted what many of us already know: the violations we see indicate that all these systems must change and be dismantled. Inspired and motivated by the #ShutDownIrwin, #BlackLivesMatter, #DefundPolice and the many other movements that have worked towards collective liberation, **now is the time for us to come together and say Shut It Down and Free Them All.**



#FreeEDC Campaign Background

Elizabeth Detention Center (EDC) has been operating on Evans Street in various forms since 1994. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) established EDC as a detention center for people arriving through Newark and JFK international airport seeking asylum. Its foundation was symbolic of the racist policies that drive U.S. immigration policies and reflected the rising xenophobia and Islamophobia. By 1995, EDC's living conditions were horrid, [driving immigrants to stage an uprising](#) that resulted in negotiations with the INS. These negotiations led to promises to shut the prison down. However, rather than shutting down the facility, the INS [contracted Correction Corporations of America](#), now known as **Core Civic (CC)**, to take over, and CC has been operating there since 1997. The property is leased from Elberon Development Group, a local New Jersey business.

Under CC, the grievances [continued](#). In 2007, the death of Boubacar Bah sparked [nationwide outrage](#), resulting in Congressional inquiries into deaths in detention and the low quality of medical services at EDC and similar facilities. These complaints continued and became part of the [evidence](#) presented to the Homeland Security Advisory Council before their historic vote to phase out private prisons like EDC in 2016; President Trump reversed the decision. CoreCivic continued to fill EDC's beds with immigrants, the vast majority ([85 percent](#)) of whom were Black and Latinx immigrants. Congress continued to scrutinize conditions, and in 2019 launched an [inquiry](#) into the Immigration Health Service Corps after learning of a series of serious complaints—including at EDC.

While EDC has the capacity for 300 detainees, as of November 2020, there are 128 people. The number fluctuates monthly; in July 2020, at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number was as low as 80. Low numbers are not reassuring, as it mostly reflects increased deportations and transfers, [contributing to the virus's spread](#). While reducing their populations, prisons and jails are transferring immigrants to ICE custody instead of releasing them. For example, in New Jersey, the [public health bill](#) passed in March 2020 by Governor Phil Murphy led to the eventual release of 2000 incarcerated people from state prisons. However, ICE immediately detained about 100 of those released, [transferring 88 of them](#) to detention centers in Texas to expedite their deportations. The prison to ICE pipeline highlights the need to abolish both systems that have

profited for so long on Black and Brown communities without any regard for their safety or well-being.

Despite pressure from activist and grassroots groups, officials at EDC have eluded accountability by their lack of response. Detainees at the facility risk severe illness and death from the virus due to COVID-19's deadly impact and the dangerous conditions, which as friends detained inside share, include dehumanizing living conditions, medical neglect, and reports of abuse.

The 2020 pandemic underscores how the immigration detention system is fundamentally flawed, notably how ICE disregards people's safety and well-being in its custody, resulting in loss of life and high-risk spread. According to a [report](#) by Detention Watch Network, "ICE's *failure to release people from detention during the pandemic added over 245,000 cases to the total U.S. caseload.*" Since ICE began reporting the number of COVID-19 cases, there have [been 7801 confirmed cases and eight deaths](#). ICE has a notorious history of medical neglect. [A recent report](#) by AFSC, Detention Resistance, and Pueblo Sin Fronteras highlights the horrid conditions in Otay Mesa Detention Center, a sister site to EDC run by Core Civic. This report, and others, show that ***"prisons and detention centers aren't just amplifiers of a public health crisis; they are a public health crisis."***

The #FreeEDC campaign answers the [#FreeThemAll](#) campaign's call, which allows us to imagine new ways of existing outside of incarceration systems that impinge on everyone's right to have dignity and justice.

Strategic Framework

1. Responsibly shut down EDC and end ICE detention in N.J.
2. End Immigration Detention and abolish ICE as part of the broader call of abolishing the prison industrial complex
3. Involve impacted community members, former and current detainees alike, to increase awareness about EDC, private prison companies, and ICE tactics
4. Answer the call of #Free Them All

#FreeEDC Timeline

February 2020

EDC shut down Friends First of New Jersey and New York's hotline. First Friends is an organization that grew out of efforts to provide support and social services to people held at EDC and has since expanded to support and serve all jails and prisons holding immigrants in New Jersey. They maintained a hotline where all friends detained at EDC can call and speak to a First Friends employee or volunteer, free of charge. Often, this hotline served as a lifeline for many and helped mitigate vital services and legal support.

March 2020

On **March 19**, the public learned of the [first reported case](#) in the nation of an ICE staffer in an immigration jail contracting COVID-19: a medical staffer at EDC.

On **March 20**, over 40 N.J. based immigrant rights advocates, religious organizations, service providers, and community groups [signed a letter](#) to Director John Tsoukaris, Field Office Director of the Newark Field Office, calling on him to implement these steps to reduce the devastating impact of COVID-19:

- **Responsibly release all immigrant detainees currently in ICE custody in the state of New Jersey**
- **Suspend all ICE check-ins**
- **Suspend all enforcement activity throughout the state of New Jersey**
- **Suspend deportations and transfers of detainees**

May 2020

On **May 14**, it is [reported](#) that a CC employee at EDC has passed away due to COVID-19 complications.

On **May 15**, detained individuals represented by the American Friends Service Committee's Immigrants Rights Program, New York University School of Law, and the Immigrant Defense Project filed a [class-action](#) lawsuit to release all immigrants held at the Elizabeth Detention Center (EDC). In retaliation for this lawsuit, ICE's Newark Office deported Héctor García Mendoza, one of the lead plaintiffs in the lawsuit, days after the team filed the case. Since his deportation, Hector has gone missing -- neither his attorney in New Jersey nor his family in Mexico knows where he is, and there is fear for his life and safety.

On **May 22**, *18 members of Congress, including New Jersey Congressman Albio Sires (NJ-08), Congressman Frank Pallone (NJ-06), Congressman Bill Pascrell, Jr. (NJ-09), Congressman Donald M. Payne, Jr. (NJ-10), and Congresswoman Bonnie Watson-Coleman (NJ-12)* submitted [an inquiry](#) into Hector García Mendoza's disappearance, demanding answers.

July 2020

On **July 10th**, AFSC and partners send [a letter](#) to Director John Tsoukaris, repeating the demands sent in March. The letter added a renewed call for transparency, a call for ICE to restore the First Friends hotline, and finally, a demand to let Hector's loved ones know about his whereabouts. To date, there have been no responses to these letters and calls.

On **July 17**, in response to local organizing, Elberon Development Group [announces](#) they plan to end their relationship with Core Civic due to activists' pressure.

November 2020

EDC is experiencing a COVID outbreak, and entire dorms are placed under quarantine, especially whenever new transfers arrive. As of December 10, 2020, 17 people currently in EDC have officially tested positive for COVID (37 total since March 2020). When EDC mandates a quarantine in the dorms, the people inside the dorms do not have access to courts or legal library for a minimum of two weeks. Often, this is not coordinated with the courts, hindering cases, and potentially leading to dire legal consequences.

On **November 20**, counsel representing the government in the class action lawsuit filed an update on EDC conditions, confirming three positive cases amongst friends who are detained and positive numbers amongst staff members. It also notes the death of a medical staff member from COVID conditions.

On **November 23**, Judge Esther Salas, the Federal Court Judge who is hearing the class action lawsuit, issues a ruling permitting individuals held in EDC to pursue their class-action lawsuit. The lawsuit centers around the question of whether ICE is violating agency rules in its handling of the pandemic.

On **November 24**, the American Friends Service Committee's Immigrants Rights Program, New York University School of Law, and the Immigrant Defense Project issued a press release highlighting new information released by ICE detailing some of the COVID outbreak. It renews the demands to release all detainees responsibly and to shut down the Elizabeth Detention Center.

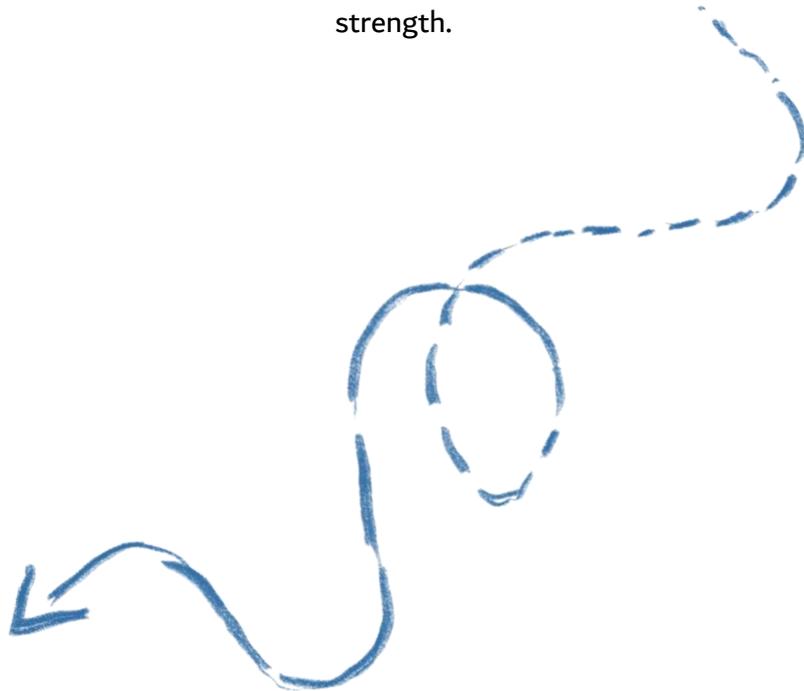


Updates

- Since Elberon's announcement in July, they have shown no movement or progress towards shutting down the facility. Elberon has not been answering inquiries.
- ICE is looking to [add centers that would house up to 900 migrants](#) within a 60-mile radius of New York City. AFSC has joined a Freedom of Information Act request to get details about ICE's plans.
- With the Covid-19 second wave hitting strong, there are reports that numbers are spiking in the EDC, leading to quarantining policies that isolate friends who are detained from their families and lawyers, impacting access to legal support and court representations.
- Three other prisons detain migrants in N.J.: Hudson County (which has recently [extended its contract for another ten years](#)), Bergen County, and [Essex County](#) jails. Conditions there are equally, if not more deplorable, than EDC. [Several immigrant detainees are currently on a hunger strike at Bergen County jail.](#)

Stories Spotlight

Often, amid collective actions, movements, and the fast news cycle of the day, the people at the heart of the matter are reduced to statistics. The people inside EDC have names, families, dreams, and desires, and those who filed the class-action lawsuit filed it out of hope and strength.



Bob Lupini Nsimba, 28, reports being treated as less than human by Elizabeth Detention Center officials, fed little more than bread and rice, and exposed to cramped and unsanitary living conditions. Among other ailments, Mr. Nsimba has high blood pressure and psychological symptoms of trauma exposure, which subject him to a heightened risk of serious medical complications from COVID-19.



Héctor García Mendoza, 30, was detained at Elizabeth Detention Center in March 2020. He shared a dorm with dozens of other detained men, some of them ill. There was little space among the men, and the living spaces were filthy. A person living with asthma, Mr. García, experienced chest pain and shortness of breath while detained, but the medical staff refused him adequate treatment. Sadly, he was deported in June 2020 and is still missing in Mexico.



Muhammad Imran-Shahid is a 23-year-old citizen of Pakistan who came to the United States in November 2018 to seek protection from religious persecution. Although Mr. Imran-Shahid has close family friends in New York and throughout the country, ICE has insisted on maintaining his detention during the long process of applying for asylum, which has made it difficult for him to gather evidence to support his case. Since October 29, he has been at the Elizabeth Detention Center.

Being detained has caused Mr. Imran-Shahid to suffer from depression and insomnia. Since the pandemic began, he reports that the detention facility does not provide adequate cleaning supplies, does not ensure consistent access to hand soap, provides substandard medical care, and forces detainees to eat and sleep within feet of one another. He notes that protecting oneself from infection under these circumstances is "impossible." Mr. Imran-Shahid believes that nobody should be forced to endure such humiliating and hazardous conditions.

(Artwork by Jenny Polak)

Point Plans & Action Steps

- IMMEDIATE RELEASE
- RESPONSIBLE SHUTDOWN
- END IMMIGRATION DETENTION
- ABOLISH ICE
- SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES & RELEASED MIGRANTS

Due to the inhumane conditions and the violations of rights as mandated by the [Universal Human Rights Deceleration](#), we demand that ICE release all detained friends from the Elizabeth Detention Center. In the meantime, we ask that until they are released, conditions inside the facility must be improved and that friends who are detained receive humane treatment. To prevent the spread of COVID, PPE, hand sanitizers must be provided, and clean medical supplies must be used. To ensure their right to legal counsel, access to courts, the legal library and their attorneys must not be hindered.

We also demand the suspension of all forced deportations and transfers of friends who are detained (that includes the transfer of people from prisons and jails to immigration detention).



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DEMAND ICE release all detained friends

- Organize targeting campaigns to ICE officials
- Post on your social media platforms talking points to raise awareness and place pressure on ICE

RESPONSIBLE SHUTDOWN

PERMANENTLY
SHUTDOWN EDC

TAKE ACTION



RESPONSIBLE SHUTDOWN

DEMAND ICE ENDS CONTRACT WITH CORE CIVIC AND SHUTS DOWN ELIZABETH DETENTION CENTER

- Organize campaigns targeting ICE and NJ policymakers to take action to shut down EDC while working with the community to ensure people are released and not transferred far from family and counsel
- Put pressure on Elberon Development Group to end its lease agreement with CC and address the harm the agreement has had on immigrant communities

END IMMIGRATION DETENTION

End ICE Contracts in NJ,
Demand NO New
Contracts

TAKE ACTION



END IMMIGRATION DETENTION

DEMAND ICE ENDS CONTRACT WITH CORE CIVIC AND SHUTS DOWN ELIZABETH DETENTION CENTER

- Organize targeting campaigns to ICE officials and NJ Policymakers
- Call your local representatives to support upcoming legislation to End ICE contracts

ABOLISH ICE

DEMAND an end to ICE
and their racist policies
that terrorize
communities

TAKE ACTION



ABOLISH ICE

DEMAND AN END TO ICE, INVEST IN
COMMUNITY'S WELL-BEING

- Organize targeting campaigns to NJ
Policymakers
- Learn what alternatives [can be imagined](#)

SUPPORT AND HEAL

FIND WAYS TO
SUPPORT AND HELP
THE HEALING PROCESS
OF COMMUNITY
MEMBERS

TAKE ACTION!



#FREETHEMALL #ABOLISHICE #CLOSETHECAGES

In Solidarity:

A STATEMENT FROM SABASTIAN* WHO IS CURRENTLY DETAINED AT ELIZABETH DETENTION CENTER

“Yes. I have a statement that I would love to say: (November 2020)

We are all humans, and all of us have the right to receive proper medical care. Unfortunately, in this immigration detention center, we are just numbers for the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE), who don't care about us humans. Our human rights and Constitutional Rights are violated by the private company Core Civic and the medical staff on a daily basis. In this pandemic, Covid-19, we are suffering as is the whole world, but with some differences- we can't protect ourselves in this center. We didn't receive any proper clean and new PPE, face masks, face shields, gloves, hands sanitizer, and other important protective equipment. We got two masks for one-time use two weeks ago, and now we are using those masks daily. We don't have any N95 masks, and we don't receive new masks every day—we using communal regular cheap soap for cleaning our hands and bodies. We don't receive enough vitamin C.

In my dorm, in two days, there were two positive cases of Covid-19, and those two guys were removed [by EDC staff] from our dorm. We don't have social distancing 6ft, because the rooms are small and the rooms are crowded. Currently, 128 people are retained inside the building with a lot of positive cases.

We were asking for release. We ask for a GPS bracelet to get outside to care about ourselves and have better options to protect ourselves, get better medical care, see family, and be with our community around. To have a chance to survive.

To get the option for protection. Medical staff, Ms. Jean, told us that we are receiving the best care ever, which is not true. They don't care about us. If this center is to protect immigrants, how is this protection? They can't protect us from this invisible enemy that has already killed more than one million people globally and more than 250000 in the United States of America.

I am in the room with people who have underlying conditions (high risk). One has asthma; one detainee had one week ago pneumonia. I had surgery in July near my tailbone and was bleeding for four months after it, and I didn't receive any great medical care. Now I was supposed to have another surgery because I am still bleeding and in pain. The medical staff messes up with my health, and now I am suffering and can't protect myself. I am currently, as a lot of people on Ibuprofen pain medication (from study, we know it is not good to use ibuprofen with covid-19); that's the care we are receiving. Unprofessional, without responsibilities and care. We are just a number.

Where is United we stand?

This country is the first in the world to say: We nation of the United States protect all the people in the world.

We immigrants are asking for your help. The United States of America, we who are held in these detention facilities asking you, release us. Give us a chance for life, for protection.

Show us your power, your humanity, and that you care!

The United States was built on immigrants, and now we are held like animals in cages”.

CALL/ EMAIL TEMPLATE:

Dear [Insert Name HERE],

My name is [Insert Name Here]. I am writing to express my grave concerns about the well-being of migrants detained at Elizabeth Detention Center (EDC) and demand that you work towards the responsible release of all the people held there. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the community has made repeated attempts to request transparency, improve conditions, and demand that you do everything in your power to ensure the freedom of people held in EDC. COVID is spreading in the detention center at an alarming rate, and officials continue not to acknowledge any of these requests.

Since the start of the pandemic, at least 37 people in detention have contracted COVID, 17 of which are current. Conditions at EDC prevent appropriate state-mandated social distancing, increasing transmission rates for both detainees and staff personnel and unnecessarily risking the lives of dozens, if not hundreds of people. Reports have indicated denial of requests for adequate personal protective gear, staff personnel not wearing masks and disregarding essential precautions, lack of proper medical care and hygienic and sterilizing products, and crowding of small spaces.

These dehumanizing and dangerous conditions alongside the continued rise of COVID cases in EDC are significant causes for you to take a responsible and just stance that uplifts the value of life and human dignity. Many people in detention have already experienced traumas, and being locked up in a facility like EDC only exacerbates any mental and physical illnesses they currently have. Additionally, partners, children, and other family members have been unreasonably stripped of the support and care of a loved one. It is your moral obligation to call for the end of this dehumanization.

Who to
target?



Primary Targets: Immigration and Customs Officials

Tony Pham, Acting Director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement:

Email: tony.h.pham@ice.dhs.gov

Twitter: @DirectorICEgov

John Tsoukaris, Field Office Director Newark Field Office:

Email: John.Tsoukaris@ice.dhs.gov

Michael Anderson, Assistant Field Office Director

Email: Michael.C.Anderson@ice.dhs.gov

Phone: 973-776-3240 ext 3295

Richard Rocha, Assistant Director, Partnership and Engagement, ICE:

202-407-5142 Richard.a.rocha@ice.dhs.gov

Primary Targets: Elberon Development Group.

Anne Evans Estabrook, Chairman

anne@elberon.com, 908.272.7555

Dave Gibbons, President & CEO,

dave@elberon.com, 908.272.7555

Terry Armstrong, Senior Vice President of Leasing & Acquisitions

terry@elberon.com 908.272.7555

Secondary Targets: New Jersey Elected Officials

Albio Sirus, Congressman representing 8th District (Elizabeth is in the 8th district)

Phone: (908) 820-0692

West New York office at (201) 558-0800

Jersey City office at (201) 309-0301



J. Christian Bollwage, Mayor of the City of Elizabeth

908-820-4170

Webmaster@ElizabethNJ.org

jmalone@elizabethnj.org

Phil Murphy, Governor of NJ:

Phone: 609-292-6000

Fax: https://faxzero.com/fax_governor/New_Jersey (Send as a cover sheet and PDF)

George Helmy- Chief of Staff george.helmy@nj.gov

Deborah Cornavaca - Deputy Chief of Staff deborah.cornavaca@nj.gov

Cory Booker, NJ Senator:

Phone: (973) 639-8700

[Email Cory](mailto:CoryBooker@nj.gov)

Robert Menendez, NJ Senator:

Phone: (973) 645-3030

[Email Bob](mailto:BobMenendez@nj.gov)

ABOUT US:

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that includes people of various faiths committed to social justice, peace, and humanitarian service. AFSC bases its work on the belief in every person's worth and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice. AFSC's Newark office has been operating for over 25 years, serving the community needs and providing legal services to detained folks at the Elizabeth Detention Center. You can find more information about the #FreeEDC campaign on [our website](#).

#FREE THEM ALL.

