Alternative to detention pilot programs have proven successful and cost-efficient.

- A study conducted from 1997 to 2000 in the U.S. by the Vera Institute of Justice, entitled the Appearance Assistance Project (hereinafter “Vera Project”), found that alternatives saved the federal government almost $4,000 per person and boasted an overall 91% appearance rate of non-citizens at all required hearings, compared to 71% for nonparticipants. The rate of compliance with final orders of removal nearly doubled for those in the program.

This overwhelming rate of success was the result of supervision in conjunction with substantial support and assistance provided by community-based organizations. The Vera Project demonstrated that supervised alternative to detention programs cost only $12, which stands in stark contrast to the $164 daily price-tag on detention in 2011. Today, there are successful models of alternative to detention models administered by NGOs across the country.

- Although Congress, in making past appropriations for detention alternative programs, has specifically referred to the need for community-based organization partnership, it has become clear that supervised release programs similar to the Vera Project are not part of ICE’s vision of alternatives.

What you can do....

Attend monthly vigils at the GEO detention center in Aurora to support those detained or in deportation proceedings and to speak out for immigrant justice. The vigils are the first Monday of the month at 6:00 pm at 30th Avenue and Peoria St. Aurora CO, hosted by Coloradans for Immigrant Rights, a project of American Friend Service Committee and community members.

Deportation and Detention: Deportation and Detention have increased under the Obama Administration.

In the first year of the Obama Administration, ICE was responsible for deporting 387,790 immigrants.

- From October 1, 2009 to May 23, 2011, the U.S. government had deported 1,026,517 people, almost more than both terms of the Bush administration combined. Compared with the average number of deportations during the second term of the Bush Administration (approximately 240,000 per year), the Obama Administration has increased deportations by more than 60%. The Obama Administration deports more than 1,000 immigrants per day, compared to the average 650 immigrants deported daily under the Bush Administration’s second term.

Your tax dollars are lining the pockets of for-profit detention and prison companies and their investors!

- Immigration’s FY2013 budget for detention will cost you $5.34 million per day. In 2009, the U.S. government detained approximately 400,000 people at an annual cost of more than $1.7 billion in immigration custody in a hodgepodge of about 250 facilities.
The average cost of detaining an immigrant is approximately $164 per person/per day.\(^2\)

Alternatives to detention, which generally include a combination of reporting and electronic monitoring, are effective and significantly cheaper, with some programs costing as little as $12 per day. These alternatives to detention still yield an estimated 93% appearance rate before the immigration courts.\(^4\)

Revenues and stock prices are skyrocketing for private prison companies that build immigration prisons, like Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) and GEO Group, Inc. These companies have an incentive to urge the government to build more jails, and in fact, regularly lobby in Washington, DC for more detention. Detention and Removal Operations Program (DRO) was one of only nine programs (out of 95 programs investigated by the Government Accountability Office) estimated to be at risk of making more than $10 million in improper payments (such as overpayments to contractors).\(^5\)

As a result of this surge in detention and deportation, Individuals are detained in jails or jail-like conditions that are inhumane.

Under US constitutional principles and international human rights law, liberty cannot be restricted without due process. Decisions to restrict individual liberty, whether by full physical detention or use of an alternative to detention, should always be made on a case-by-case basis. Broadly applied mandatory detention violates this basic principle. The Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement still indiscriminately and overwhelmingly use detention instead of choosing alternatives under what discretion they have.

Immigrants in detention include families, both undocumented and documented immigrants, many who have been in the US for years and are now facing exile, survivors of torture, asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups including pregnant women, children, and individuals who are seriously ill without proper medication or care.

Current detention policies and contracts do not impose any penalties or consequences for being sub-standard. Detainees are often subjected to arbitrary punishment, including shackling, solitary confinement, neglect of basic medical and hygienic needs, denial of outdoor recreation, and verbal, physical, and even sexual abuse.\(^6\)

On any given day, over 60% of all immigration detainees are kept outside federally run facilities in the more than 200 local prisons, jails and in for-profit contract facilities. A person in immigration detention is not serving out a sentence because of a criminal conviction; yet, the majority of detainees are mixed with the general prison population, including people convicted of violent crimes.\(^7\)

The lack of consequences in a mostly privatized system has led to people being denied access to phones, lawyers and law libraries and deplorable health conditions in many centers which have led to the deaths of at least 129 people since 2003.\(^7\)

What are the Alternatives to Detention?

Alternatives to detention may involve releasing individuals to the homes of friends or family or using shelters rather than detention facilities. These programs could also be based on conditions such as supervision and case management, telephonic reporting or home visits or, if a higher level of restriction is necessary, the use of electronic monitoring bracelets or home detention.