

## Immigrant & Detainee Solidarity Committee



### PRESS RELEASE

**MEDIA ALERT: Press Conference Outside of Suffolk County House of Corrections (20 Bradston St, Boston MA) at 9:00 AM, Thursday, September 26, 2013.** The press conference will take place on the Mass Ave Connector between Massachusetts Ave and I-93, in view of the Detainee Cells.

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### IMMIGRANTS IN DETENTION NEGOTIATE TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS AT SUFFOLK

Nearly 40 immigrants detained by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at the Suffolk County House of Corrections in Boston are now in negotiations to address substandard and unsanitary prison conditions. They presented a letter to corrections officials with a list of demands on Tuesday, September 24, stating that if their demands were not met they would call a hunger strike.

The detainees appeals to Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins, Superintendent Eugene Sumpter, Jr., Acting Field Office Director Sean Gallagher, and Assistant Field Office Director Todd Thurlow of ICE include:

- **Improve food safety:** Trays, dishes, and utensils are poorly cleaned. Many detainees have recently been diagnosed with stomach ulcers caused by infection with the H. pylori bacterium. They believe this infection is being spread by poor sanitation.
- **Equalize access to programs and services:** Unlike other detainees, immigrants held in ICE detention do not have access to the prison's law library, and only to computers. The need for access is crucial, as there is no right to an attorney or public defender program in immigration court. ICE detainees are currently required to spend most of their days locked in their cells often with the lights turned off, and only have one television in the recreation area. These inhumane conditions foster personal conflicts.
- **Support visitation rights:** Immigrants held at Suffolk and other ICE detention centers are often transferred to facilities far from their families, making visitation prohibitive. The process to have family and friends visit could be made smoother through an digital form. Right now, the detainee must place the prospective visitor on a list, this person must go to the detention center office--even if it is out of state--to pick up a form. Then, they're required to fill out and mail the form for permission to visit. The prospective visitor has to wait three weeks for it to be processed.

Suffolk County House of Corrections has responded to the detainees, but it is not clear if changes are in progress or that the demands will be met. If these demands are not met, Suffolk will likely be in violation of their agreement with ICE, whose standards state on their website:

- "Food service facilities and equipment will meet established governmental health and safety

codes, as documented by an independent, outside source.”

- “Facility cleanliness and sanitation will be maintained at the highest level.”
- “Detainees will have daily opportunities to participate in leisure-time activities outside their respective cells or rooms.”
- “Detainees will be advised of visiting privileges and procedures as part of the facility’s admission and orientation program in a language they can understand.”

Suffolk is one of over 200 county prisons and local jails nationwide contracted by ICE to hold over two-thirds of the immigrants in detention, as reported by the Detention Watch Network (DWN). ICE pays an average of \$164 per immigrant detained per day under these contracts to places like Suffolk, according to the DWN. Roughly 250 men and women are detained at Suffolk alone.

The Immigrant & Detainee Solidarity Committee (Boston New Sanctuary Movement, Brazilian Immigrant Center, Centro Presente, MIRA Coalition, MataHari Eye of the Day, Resist the Raids, and Student Immigrant Movement) will also hold a prayer vigil and rally outside Suffolk at 20 Bradston St., to support the detainees’ negotiations on Thursday evening from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM. *“These events are critical in bringing attention to the deplorable reality of mass immigrant family separation in the U.S. The sub-standard conditions of incarcerated people faced in detention compromises the inherent dignity of all humans behind and outside those walls. We are sending a message that we are not turning a blind eye to this injustice,”* said Monique Nguyen, Executive Director of MataHari: Eye of the Day.

The immigrant detainees at Suffolk are prepared to initiate a hunger strike if needed. They were inspired by the Boston New Sanctuary Movement (BNSM) vigils, Not One More National Week of Fasting and Action, and other events held in the past. In continued solidarity, BNSM and its partners will hold its fall vigil outside Suffolk County House of Correction on Sunday, September 29, at 2 PM. This interfaith group (approximately 20 Boston metro area churches and organizations) has held vigils outside Suffolk for the last five years to call for immigration reform and to end the detention of immigrants.





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**Notes to editor(s):**

Location: Suffolk County House of Correction at 20 Bradston Street, Boston

Press Conference: 9:00 AM

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Vigil & Rally: 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

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Sources:

Detention Watch Network - <http://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/resources>

ICE Standards - <http://www.ice.gov/detention-standards/2008/>

Info on Number of Detainees held at Suffolk -

<http://www.immigrationdetention.org/wiki/suffolk-county-jail/>