



FACTSHEET

Decarcerate PA

IMMIGRANT DETENTION AND MASS INCARCERATION

Private prison corporations have influenced and fueled legislation that targets our community members and promotes their imprisonment. The criminal judicial system has invested in longer sentences and increased pathways to detention to fuel prison expansion, which has resulted in a disproportionate racial impact. During the rise of the “War on Drugs” in the 1980s, African American communities filled overcrowded prisons receiving unfairly harsh sentences, pulling their families apart. After 9/11, immigrant communities were the new “threat to national security,” and in exponentially increasing numbers since 2008, they fill detention facilities by the thousands. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) assumes that the problem of immigration can be solved by exposing detainees to brutal and inhumane conditions of confinement at massive costs to American taxpayers.¹

The system of immigrant detention is operated by the Department of Homeland Security and costs taxpayers over \$2 billion in FY 2012 alone. This money provides DHS with funding to maintain its current detention capacity of 33,400 people in over 250 facilities spread around the country on any given day, including operational expenses, at an average of \$5.5 million dollars per day.² In Pennsylvania alone, DHS detains approximately 1,600 immigrants at eleven county prisons, two federal facilities, and a secure shelter.³ Many of these men and women are held at York County Prison, a county jail that contacts with ICE and has a history of abusing and neglecting the people incarcerated there.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has relied on local police, to meet its goal to detain and deport approximately 400,000 immigrants every year since 2008.⁴ Different programs around the country, such as Secure Communities (S-Comm) have resulted in the cooperation between the local police and immigration enforcement authorities. Under the S-Comm program, all biographic information taken from persons during an arrest is instantly available to DHS, even for offenses as minor as traffic violations. In Philadelphia, information about everyone related to a crime, including arrestees, victims and witnesses, is on the database called PARS (Preliminary Arraignment Reporting System). Since 2008, the city has agreed to share this information with ICE.⁵ By directly communicating this information to DHS and placing people in immediate danger of deportation, communities are afraid to report crimes or cooperate as witnesses. Communities are left alone, unable

¹ Immigrant Detention. Recent Court Cases, Issues and Articles. American Civil Liberties Union. Website. <http://www.aclu.org/immigrants-rights/detention>. Accessed on October 2012.

² The Math of Immigration Detention: Runaway Costs for Immigration Detention Do Not Add Up to Sensible Policies. National Immigration Forum. Website. <http://www.immigrationforum.org/images/uploads/MathofImmigrationDetention.pdf>. Accessed on October 2012.

³ Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center <http://www.pirclaw.org/index.php/about>

⁴ About The U.S. Detention and Deportation System. Detention Watch Network. Website. <http://detentionwatchnetwork.org/aboutdetention>

⁵ Office of the District Attorney. City of Philadelphia. Website. <http://phillyda.wordpress.com/2010/07/16/the-district-attorney-votes-to-continue-agreement-with-ice-and-allow-access-to-pars-database/> Accessed on October 2012.

to seek help in cases of emergency. Paradoxically, S-Comm, having been implemented nation-wide, makes our communities more unsafe.

Detention for Profit

Immigrant detention centers have been consistently denounced for providing inadequate medical care, as well as abuse and violations of human rights. Immigrants do not have meaningful access to lawyers or hope for a fair hearing; only approximately 15% of detainees have real access to legal representation.

Private facilities do not follow a protocol or set of standards in the provision of humane conditions for the detainees. Actually, privately operated facilities receive more complaints relating to conditions compared to publicly operated prisons. However, ICE has been increasing its use of private facilities. Lack of regulations in immigrant detention facilities also means that immigrants accused of civil violations, such as overstaying a visa, can be in detention for months or years. Like prisoners, immigrants held in detention centers are deprived of their liberty, but have even more limited access to constitutional protections.

Almost half of immigrant detainees are being held in private facilities in 2012. ICE's use of private detention facilities has helped buoy profits for prison companies. Its contracts accounted for 20% and 14% of revenue for CCA (Corrections Corporation of America) and the GEO Group respectively in 2011.⁶ These prison corporations have invested huge amounts of money lobbying for anti-immigrant bills like Arizona SB 1070 that have facilitated prison expansion.

Social tensions are fueled by policies based on racial profiling and create a legal system that disproportionately targets people of color. The criminalization of African Americans, poor people, and immigrants, is driven by corporate purposes that deeply affect our communities. Immigrant detention and the policies that fuel it are one piece of a larger system of mass incarceration that criminalizes survival, breaks apart families, and makes our communities less safe. Decarcerate PA is calling for an immediate moratorium on all new prison and detention center construction, an end to Secure Communities, and an end to deportations. Instead of spending money on immigrant detention, S-Comm, and other anti-immigrant measures, Pennsylvania should be investing in the things our communities really need- education, housing, jobs, healthcare, and reentry services.

That's why Decarcerate PA stands for community reinvestment and a halt to all prison expansion.

⁶ Mason, Cody. Dollars and Detainees. The Growth of For-Profit Detention.



Decarcerate PA is a coalition of organizations and individuals seeking an immediate and lasting moratorium on all new prisons and prison expansions, county jails, and immigrant detention facilities, and also seeking positive policy changes that will reduce Pennsylvania's prison population and reinvest money into our communities.

decarceratepa@gmail.com * decarceratepa.info * (267) 217-3372