



DETAINEE ALLIES .ORG

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Grassroots Group Documents Inhumane Conditions at Otay Mesa Detention Center
Firsthand Accounts from Detained Refugees

[San Diego, CA, 2/1/2019—] Detainee Allies, a San Diego-based grassroots organization, has obtained written testimony from refugees being held at the Otay Mesa Detention Center (OMDC), alleging inhumane conditions. OMDC is a privately-run Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility managed by the for-profit prison company CoreCivic.

These testimonies were gleaned from hand-written letters received by the organization from detainees over the past six months. They have been compiled into a report that was released today on the organization's website, DetaineeAllies.org.

"We are calling on Attorney General Xavier Becerra to read the report, read our archive of letters, and listen to these voices," explained Detainee Allies co-founder, Jennifer Gonzalez. "He has been tasked by the California legislature with investigating conditions at all detention centers in the State by March 1."

The Detainee Allies report documents contaminated or insufficient food, medical neglect, forced labor and wage theft, lack of access to basic hygiene necessities, isolation, and other shocking conditions.

"Detainee letters give us a very stark view into the lives of asylum-seeking refugees and migrants now held in American prisons," says Kate Swanson, Associate Professor of Geography at San Diego State University and Detainee Allies volunteer. "Letters from detainees who have been moved from San Diego to prisons in other states suggest that these conditions are not unique to the Otay Mesa Detention Center."

According to the report, record numbers of refugees are being sent to privately-run prisons like OMDC. In 2017, the state of California passed AB 103, promoted by Freedom for Immigrants and the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, requiring the California Attorney General to review migrant detention centers and provisioning the Attorney General \$10 million to develop a report to the legislature on his findings.

The group is also demanding that CoreCivic and other private contractors comply with California state standards for humane treatment and immediately restore public access and oversight procedures, such as stakeholder tours, that have been suspended by CoreCivic.

The report is also being sent to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and elected officials and advocacy organizations throughout California. The group is demanding that federal and state officials read the report, read letters, convene public hearings, and pull the plug on the profit-driven federal migrant detention policy. They are asking all [state employees to push for the California Public Employees' Retirement System \(CalPERS\) to divest from CoreCivic](#).

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About Detainee Allies: Detainee Allies (previously, Otay Allies) began in the Del Cerro neighborhood of San Diego in June 2018 as a house-meeting of friends and neighbors concerned about family separation and refugee detention. Since then, it has grown into a 200-member volunteer network, including human rights researchers at San Diego State University and student interns. To date, they have written to and/or received letters from over 250 individual detainees.

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