



One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

August 7, 2020

Russell B. Harper
President and CEO
Immigration Centers for America
508 Waterworks Road
Farmville, VA 23901

Dear Mr. Harper:

On March 24, 2020, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) reported a detainee at the Bergen County Jail in Hackensack, New Jersey had tested positive for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). This was the first positive test in an ICE detention facility. Subsequently, ICE has reported that thousands of its detainees have tested positive for the coronavirus, including at least 290 detainees at the Farmville Detention Center in Farmville, Virginia operated by Immigration Centers for America (ICA).¹

Detainees are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 when held in close quarters that make social distancing difficult or impossible. Over the past several months, the Committee has sought information on the actions undertaken by ICE detention contractors to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 within their facilities, including information on their compliance with COVID-19 control measures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Committee is concerned about conditions at the Farmville Detention Center. While ICA and ICE initially confirmed the presence of COVID-19 at Farmville in late April, an outbreak did not occur until earlier this month when more than 260 detainees tested positive after individuals were transferred from facilities in Florida and Arizona.² In addition,

¹ *ICE Guidance on COVID-19*, IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT, Jul. 30, 2020, <https://www.ice.gov/coronavirus>

² Jenny Gathright, *More than 70% of People Detained At The Farmville Detention Center Are COVID-Positive*, DCIST, Jul. 10, 2020. <https://dcist.com/story/20/07/10/more-than-70-of-people-detained-at-the-farmville-detention-center-are-covid-positive/>; Antonio Olivo and Gregory S. Schneider, Northam, U.S. senators ask for CDC's help with covid-19 outbreak at immigrant detention center, THE WASHINGTON POST, Jul. 29, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/virginia-politics/northam-us-senators-ask-for-cdcs-help-with-covid-19-outbreak-at-immigrant-detention-center/2020/07/29/0e5d96ba-d0ef-11ea-9038-af089b63ac21_story.html:

Farmville detainees report that they have been pepper sprayed and fired at with a “noise-distracting round” in response to their protests on the spread of the coronavirus inside the facility.³ This is dangerous as the use of irritants such as pepper spray can induce coughing, increasing a person’s chance of catching a respiratory illness such as COVID-19.⁴

The Committee requests that your company provide by August 21, 2020, documents sufficient to show:

- The total number of beds available to ICE at ICA’s Farmville Detention Center and the current ICE detainee population at the facility, including a breakdown of the detainees’ risk classifications with criteria for each risk category;
- The number of ICA personnel at the Farmville Detention Center who have tested positive for COVID-19, including the date of each positive test and the current status of each employee (such as on leave, hospitalized, returned to work, etc.);
- The number of hunger strikes that have occurred at the Farmville Detention Center since January 1, 2020, and the reason for the hunger strikes;
- The number of times pepper spray, rubber bullets, tear gas, or solitary confinement have been used at the Farmville Detention Center since January 1, 2020 and the reason for use;
- Following the transfer of 74 individuals to Farmville on June 2, 2020, describe the steps taken to isolate these individuals and ensure that they did not have COVID-19. Out of these 74, how many tested positive within two weeks of their arrival?
- The measures undertaken by ICA at the Farmville Detention Center to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among detainees and personnel after an individual in the detention facility tests positive, as well as any steps taken to mitigate the spread of the virus when detainees are transferred among facilities;
- Guidance ICA has provided to personnel and detainees held at the Farmville Detention Center explaining how the virus spreads and how to try to protect against acquiring the virus, including the date on which the guidance was provided to detainees;
- Any policies implemented by ICA from January 1, 2020, to the present regarding detainee access to personal protective equipment and hygiene supplies such as masks, hand sanitizer, soap, etc. at the Farmville Detention Center;
- Any forms issued by ICA from January 1, 2020, to the present to detainees or employees prior to their receipt and/or use of personal protective equipment and hygiene supplies provided by ICA;

³ Spencer Ackerman, *Detainees Say ICE Fired on Them During Coronavirus Protest*, THE DAILY BEAST, Jun. 30, 2020. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/detainees-say-ice-fired-on-them-during-coronavirus-protest>

⁴ Will Stone, *Tear-Gassing Protesters During An Infectious Outbreak Called 'A Recipe For Disaster'*, NPR, Jun. 5, 2020. [https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/06/05/870144402/tear-gassing-protesters-during-an-infectious-outbreak-called-a-recipe-for-disast`](https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/06/05/870144402/tear-gassing-protesters-during-an-infectious-outbreak-called-a-recipe-for-disast)

- Copies of all reports submitted to ICE regarding confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases at the Farmville Detention Center; and
- The number of individuals with confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 who have been released, transferred, or deported since June 2, 2020.

Thank you for your timely attention to this matter. Should you have any questions or require additional information, please contact my staff at (202) 226-2616.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bennie G. Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "B".

Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman