

**HEARING BEFORE THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER SECURITY, FACILITATION, & OPERATIONS**

July 13, 2020

Testimony of George C. Zoley,
Founder, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, The GEO Group

I. Introduction

Chairman Thompson, Chairwoman Rice, Ranking Member Rogers, Ranking Member Higgins, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is George Zoley and I am the Founder, Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer of The GEO Group (or GEO), established in 1984.

It is an honor to appear before you today to tell you about the heroic efforts of our front-line employees who have courageously fought the coronavirus (COVID-19) head on to ensure those entrusted to our care are safe, protected and provided access to medical care to minimize the spread of this virus and improve the prospects of recovery.

I want to thank those employees and their families for all they do day-in and day-out in support of our client's mission, their community and our country.

This statement addresses five main topics:

First, I provide information about the history of our company and address our values, accountability, varied work, and successful initiatives.

Second, I describe how GEO's healthcare services are structured and managed. This strong foundation has enabled the company to respond quickly to the significant challenges posed by COVID-19.

Third, I outline the exhaustive steps that we have been taking since January 2020 to fight COVID-19. This work includes developing plans, policies and guidance in accordance with the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and other relevant authorities; educating and raising awareness among detainees and staff about the spread and prevention of COVID-19; providing personal protective equipment (PPE) to staff and detainees, along with training about PPE use; implementing separation protocols, initiating screening for COVID-19 symptoms; and managing COVID-19 testing.

Fourth, in accordance with our commitment to transparency, I provide select COVID-19 statistics for our ICE facilities.

Finally, I highlight the strong diversity of our company.

II. GEO History

For more than thirty years, The GEO Group has been a trusted service provider to federal, state and local government agencies in the United States. We deliver quality management and care for secure institutions, ICE processing centers, and community reentry facilities. We also create and provide technology that supports alternatives to detention.

Over the years, our company has evolved to become a leading provider of offender rehabilitation, post release services, and community-based programs. Our three-decade long journey has been driven by a daily pursuit of operational excellence across all our service lines.

We recognize that pursuing excellence requires frequent introspection and a commitment to taking steps to improve upon what we do every day. This commitment led us to invest in a regional operating structure approximately two decades ago, bringing the daily oversight of our facilities closer to our clients, and ensuring that we are able to respond as quickly as possible to any challenges that may arise in the delivery of our services. Today, our three regional offices are comprised of numerous subject matter experts who provide direct oversight for our secure facilities across the United States.

Our commitment to continuous improvement and accountability also led us to pursue third-party accreditation for all our U.S. secure facilities, and in many instances above and beyond our contractual requirements, as well as, all applicable non-secure community reentry facilities. This independent accreditation is based on standards set by leading organizations such as the American Correctional Association, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, and The Joint Commission, among other entities. Today, all, but our 6 newest, U.S. secure facilities are accredited by the American Correctional Association, with an average accreditation score of 99.6 percent.

We are particularly proud of our commitment to improve the lives of those entrusted to our care in state correctional facilities by providing rehabilitation and reentry programs that can reduce recidivism, prepare individuals to contribute to our Nation's workforce, and help them reintegrate into society. Our GEO Continuum of Care® (CoC) integrates enhanced offender rehabilitation, including cognitive behavioral treatment, with post-release support services to address basic community needs, including housing, transportation, food, clothing, and job placement assistance. This innovative program began as a pilot at one GEO facility in 2015 and received the 'Innovation in Corrections' award from the American Correctional Association just three years later in 2018.

GEO's 2020 annual funding commitment in support of the CoC program at 19 facilities, is approximately \$13.5 million, representing approximately 10% of GEO's net income. The implementation of our GEO Continuum of Care® has led to an increase in the number of GED/High School Equivalency degrees, vocational training certifications, and substance abuse treatment completions awarded annually throughout our facilities. These efforts reflect our company's aspiration to continually improve our services.

Contrary to what has been reported by the media, individuals and groups who oppose the private sector's role in providing services to ICE, we have never managed any shelters or facilities housing unaccompanied minors. We do not manage any border patrol holding facilities along the U.S. Southwest border. We do not manage any facilities with tent structures or chain-link fencing in housing areas, and we do not play a role in advocating for, or against, criminal justice or immigration laws. As a company, we will never take part in any of these activities.

III. GEO Services Provided to ICE

We respect the right of all persons to have a safe and humane living environment, and our commitment to this right is unwavering. This commitment calls for us to follow many sets of client standards that define and proscribe the daily operation of our facilities and programs. We think it is important to point out the difference in staffing for immigration detention at GEO's ICE processing centers, versus that of GEO's state correctional facilities that we operate on behalf of criminal justice agencies. The additional staffing at GEO's ICE processing centers is necessary to comply with the immigration detention standards that were heavily revised under President Obama's administration and that remain in effect.

Overall facility staffing at GEO's ICE processing centers is approximately 30% more than that of GEO's state correctional facilities. This difference is the result of the numerous requirements from ICE, versus the requirements from our state partners. ICE requires the additional staffing to provide more services and transportation support for ICE detainees. Healthcare staffing at GEO's ICE processing centers is approximately 117% more than that of GEO's state correctional facilities. The additional healthcare staffing is required by ICE to provide a high-level of treatment for detainees who have numerous health and mental health needs due to arriving from countries with limited healthcare services. GEO is also implementing electronic health records and virtual visits, with medical and mental health providers, to further improve its healthcare services to ICE.

The healthcare needs of the individuals in our care are often significant. Those needs can include acute or chronic healthcare conditions and mental health issues. However, according to statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice, the mortality rate in state correctional facilities averages 256 per 100,000 inmates. In the federal prison system, the average mortality rate is 225 per 100,000 inmates. By comparison, the mortality rate at ICE processing centers is significantly lower at less than three per 100,000 detainees.

Under the programmatic supervision of ICE's Immigration Health Services Corps (IHSC), GEO staff are often responsible for the healthcare at our facilities. In other locations, we subcontract with a healthcare company to provide medical care to ICE detainees.

GEO healthcare services are under the oversight of the GEO Healthcare Division located in our corporate headquarters in Boca Raton, Florida. The Division is led by a Chief Medical Officer with four decades of experience in clinical medicine. He is supported by 12 subject matter experts in correctional healthcare, dental services, mental health services, quality control, administration, and off-site healthcare claims management, as well as clinical care support.

Our Healthcare Division monitors staff vacancies, clinical outcomes, special incidents, clinical encounters, outside patient care, medication management, and updates to clinical guidelines. For all facilities at which GEO itself provides healthcare services, local oversight and support is provided through one of GEO's three Regional Offices, located in Charlotte, North Carolina; San Antonio, Texas; and Los Angeles, California.

Each Regional Office has a Regional Director of Correctional Health Services, and each Regional Director is supported by up to three Regional Managers of Correctional Health Services. GEO strives to ensure that healthcare staff, including medical, nursing, dental, and mental health professionals, are available to every individual in our care.

The facility healthcare staff fulfill their clinical and administrative responsibilities by working with our security staff, to address any health situation that may arise. Our security staff are also trained to manage an urgent/emergent health situation when healthcare staff may not be immediately available, in accordance with GEO's policies and well-defined procedures. Initial screening for medical, mental health and dental care is to be completed as soon as possible after intake, and generally within 12 hours of reception at our facilities. Those who are identified as most seriously ill are prioritized for immediate clinical evaluation.

As required by ICE's detention standards, we provide full healthcare exams to be conducted by a qualified physician, nurse practitioner, physician assistant or registered nurse within 14-calendar days following admission. Based on the results of the full medical examination, diagnostic and therapeutic plans for any identified conditions are developed.

All individuals in our care have coordinated 24/7 access to healthcare services. They are given the opportunity to submit oral or written healthcare requests at any time. These requests are then picked up each day by healthcare staff and are reviewed and prioritized by qualified healthcare professionals.

All individuals in our care have the right to refuse or question the healthcare they are receiving through an established grievance process. This process is an important component of our Quality Improvement program. Once a grievance has been submitted and reviewed, the issues raised are evaluated and immediate corrective action is taken if warranted. Face-to-face interviews are often recommended, so problems can be resolved effectively and promptly. The grievance process is carefully explained to all individuals in our care.

Suicide risk assessment and prevention is an important objective of ICE's detention standards. Accordingly, our suicide prevention program is clearly defined in policies and procedures, and serves to minimize the occurrence of a suicide by reducing risk and self-destructive individual behaviors. We take our responsibility to provide prompt and comprehensive health and mental health care to everyone in our care seriously, as evidenced by the policies, practices and professional guidelines we follow in our facilities. Professional guidelines include those established by the American Correctional Association, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, and the Joint Commission.

IV. GEO's Response to COVID-19

Based upon existing infectious and communicable disease protocols, in mid-January 2020 the GEO Group (GEO) began its expansive planning processes to ensure we were taking a proactive approach to properly prepare for the potential spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in our facilities. The GEO Group initiated a multidisciplinary Incident Command type posture from our Corporate Headquarters to promote and sustain awareness and readiness to fight the COVID-19 Virus. The following bullets highlight our actions:

- In February GEO focused heavily on an “Awareness & Educational” campaign, providing ever-changing updates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to all facilities which highlighted the importance of social distancing, proper handwashing and sanitation practices. This information was posted throughout our facilities to include staff work areas and detainee living areas.
- GEO continuously played educational videos on big screen TVs in detainee living areas at all GEO facilities. Additionally, leadership staff conducted frequent educational townhall meetings with all detainees using translation services and provided continued staff education daily at shift briefings as well as all meetings with staff.
- Even before CDC guidance was issued, GEO took significant steps to prevent the spread of the virus.
- In February, GEO's Chief Medical Officer provided comprehensive technical guidance in a policy titled Coronavirus (COVID -19) Management that outlined the treatment and containment approach for COVID-19 based on the latest information provided by the CDC.
- GEO's Corporate Operations and Medical staff developed the framework for a Unified Pandemic Plan specific to COVID-19 to promote consistency in our responses companywide.
- On February 26, 2020, GEO's Chief Medical Officer issued a Memorandum advising field staff of forthcoming COVID-19 Guidance and Emergency Plans to be utilized for the screening and prevention of COVID-19. The Memorandum also included informational materials from the Center of Disease Control (CDC) to be posted throughout the facilities.
- On February 27, 2020, updated Healthcare Policies were shared with all GEO Facility Health Service Administrators.
- On February 28, 2020, the COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan was disseminated to all Facility Administrators who implemented it by March 6th and immediately began “table-top” emergency preparedness exercises, even before there was a pandemic declaration.
- GEO began temperature screening of all new arrivals in the sally-ports before they entered the facility. If an individual's temperature exceeded 100 degrees, he or she was placed in medical isolation and referred for additional medical attention.
- In early March 2020, GEO's Chief Medical Officer opened up a robust dialogue with the leadership of ICE's Immigration Health Services Corps (IHSC) on how to best respond to COVID-19.

- To promote containment, in early March, GEO began encouraging our clients to suspend social visiting to mitigate outside exposure to the individuals entrusted in our care. As of March 13, 2020, all clients had suspended social visiting.
- In March 2020, all staff and visitors entering facilities were required to complete a COVID-19 screening questionnaire and submit to a forehead temperature check prior to being admitted into a facility.
- In March 2020, GEO implemented modified detainee movement in all facilities to assist in isolating and containing any potential exposure.
- On March 13, 2020, a COVID-19 monitoring process was implemented to track critical data points.
- On March 20, 2020, daily Command Center COVID-19 meetings were initiated from our corporate office with GEO's three Regional Offices.
- On March 23, 2020, the CDC issued initial interim guidance specific to Corrections and Detention entitled "Interim Guidance on Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)".
- In March 2020, GEO issued guidance directing staff with a high risk of exposure to an infected or likely infected detainee to wear the following PPE:
 - Nitrile disposable gloves
 - N95 disposable filtration respirator
 - Disposable gown
 - Eye protection/face shield
- In March 2020, COVID -19 information was posted in vital areas of our facilities, such as the front entrance, visiting areas, restrooms, health services unit, housing units, Restrictive Housing Unit and staff break rooms. Facilities ensured that detainees remained informed via townhall meetings and staff were informed by using the following venues to emphasize the important role of prevention: shift briefings, meetings with staff and department heads.
- In March 2020, the Chief Medical Officer and Executive VP, Human Resources, promulgated guidance regarding how employees should return to work and the approval procedures required for employees who had previously tested positive for COVID-19.
- In March 2020, we increased our supply of food at each facility to an 8-week supply. We also created an option to extend that supply to add an additional 3 months.
- In March 2020, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration suspended, temporarily the requirement for annual N95 respirator fit testing due to the global shortage of N95 respirators.
- In March, Corporate Health Services began publishing a periodic STOP COVID-19 newsletter to facilities administrators, health services administrators and GEO's leadership to provide educational information and to enhance communication efforts for the safety and wellbeing of the facility staff and population.

- As a company, we ensured staff received proper training on the use of PPE and in early April, consistent the CDC’s updated guidance, GEO provided surgical masks to all staff, who were strongly encouraged to use them.
- On April 6, 2020, Chief United States District Judge Ricardo S. Martinez stated in a court ruling that “there is substantial evidence before the court of robust measures at the Northwest [ICE] Detention Center to prevent an outbreak of COVID-19, to contain one should it occur, and generally to provide for the safety of the detainees housed there during the pandemic.” Judge Martinez noted that “the measures implemented by the NWDC generally track the recommendation of the DHS’s medical subject matter experts.”
- On April 10, 2020, GEO complied with the ICE/ERO Directive regarding COVID-19 Pandemic Response Requirements, which included reducing populations to approximately 75% to promote better social distancing.
- In April 2020, PPE (face masks, eye protection and gloves) were issued to all staff. In addition, all detainees were issued face masks in enough quantities to replace used masks three times per week. To ensure proper care and usage of PPE, training was provided to all staff and detainees.
- Also in April, we began identifying high-risk detainees, placing them in separate housing groups, and establishing additional protocols for temperature testing and more frequent access to the healthcare unit.
- On May 4, 2020, intake testing was initiated at the Alexandria Transfer Center in Louisiana for those identified countries requiring the testing for COVID-19.
- On May 5, 2020, at ICE’s request, the Joe Corley and Karnes Family Residential facilities started to use an Abbott COVID testing device on detainee/residents who ICE was planning to remove.
- On May 21, 2020, a representative from the Florida Department of Health visited the Broward ICE facility due to the “spike” of positive COVID-19 cases as reported in the local media. She expressed how impressed she was with the obvious efforts staff had made to address the COVID-19 crisis and preventive measures to prevent its spread inside the institution.
- Since May 27, 2020, all new persons arriving at the Adelanto ICE Processing Center are administered a COVID-19 test upon arrival and housed separately from general population detainees until cleared by medical staff.
- On June 2, 2020, the Aurora ICE Processing Center initiated saturation COVID-19 testing of all detainees. The testing was completed on June 16, 2020. The testing was conducted in coordination with the Denver metropolitan area’s Tri-County Health Department.
- June 2, 2020, the Northwest ICE Processing Center initiated saturation COVID-19 testing of all detainees. The testing was performed by the ICE Health Services Corps (IHSC) and was completed in one day.
- June 3, 2020, the Aurora ICE Processing Center commenced voluntary COVID-19 testing of all staff. The testing was also conducted in coordination with the Tri-County Health Department and was completed on June 24, 2020.

- June 4, 2020, all new commitments to the Northwest ICE Processing Center are administered a COVID-19 test upon arrival and were housed separately from general population detainees until cleared by ICE's IHSC.
- On June 4, 2020, intake testing was initiated at the LaSalle, Louisiana ICE Processing Center, as well as, the Montgomery Processing Center.
- On June 10, 2020, the South Texas ICE Processing Center initiated intake testing.
- On June 17, 2020, the Northwest ICE Processing Center commenced voluntary COVID-19 testing of all staff. The testing was conducted by the Washington State Department of Health and was completed on June 18, 2020.
- On June 22, 2020, the Karnes Family Residential facility started saturation testing of residents and staff. Testing of residents was completed on June 22, 2020. Staff testing was completed on June 29, 2020.
- We have conducted this significant work pursuant to our client's requirements, applicable healthcare guidelines, and through the engagement of our stakeholders. For example, on June 22, 2020, the South Texas ICE Processing Center conducted a tour for the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. In attendance were:
 - Rep. Joaquin Castro (D – TX 20th District)
 - Rep. Henry Cuellar (D – TX 28th District)
 - Rep. Sylvia Garcia (D- TX 29th District)
- On June 23, 2020, intake testing was initiated at the Broward, Florida; Folkston, Georgia; Pine Prairie, Louisiana; and South Louisiana ICE Processing Centers. Also, South Louisiana initiated mass testing.
- On June 25, 2020, the Montgomery Processing Center started detainee mass testing and completed it on June 29, 2020.
- On June 25, 2020, the Karnes Family Residential Center started testing upon arrival.
- On June 26, 2020, the Louisiana Department of Health, partnering with the Louisiana National Guard, began offering COVID testing for the Alexandria and LaSalle facility staff. The Broward and South Louisiana facilities initiated mass staff testing.
- Beginning on June 26, 2020, all new commitments to the Aurora ICE Processing Center are administered a COVID-19 test upon arrival and are housed separately from general population detainees until cleared by medical staff.
- Beginning June 29, 2020, all new commitments to the Mesa Verde ICE Processing Center are administered a COVID-19 test upon arrival and are housed separately from general population detainees until cleared by medical staff.

V. COVID-19 Statistics (GEO ICE Facilities)

- As of July 7, 2020, we have conducted 4,629 tests with the following results: 4,018 negative results, 611 positive results and 208 refusals, out of approximately 35,000 detainees who either entered or departed from one of our facilities in the last four months.
- **As of this writing, there are no ICE detainees that are hospitalized.**
- **As of this writing, there have been no ICE detainee deaths from COVID-19.**
- As of July 7, 2020, there have been 130 confirmed COVID-19 cases among GEO's staff who work at ICE facilities. This represents 3% of the GEO ICE staff, who total 3,735 employees.
- **There is only 1 GEO staff member from an ICE facility in the hospital at this time.**
- **No GEO employees who work at an ICE facility have died from COVID-19.**

VI. GEO's Diverse Workforce

In all areas of our business, GEO has strived to achieve wider racial, ethnic, age, and gender diversity. Across our organization, under-represented minorities -- which include African Americans, Hispanic and Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian and Native American/Alaskan -- currently account for 60% of our total U.S. employee workforce. Women make up over half our workforce in the U.S. Minorities comprise 38% of GEO's corporate workforce in the U.S., 68% of our U.S. security staff, and 28% of those serving in management positions as directors or above. GEO Group's employee population is also diverse in age. Of new hires in 2018, 37% were under age 30, 49% were between ages 30 and 50, and 27% were age 50 and older.

Additionally, we exceed all requirements in support of small, disadvantaged, or minority-owned businesses in the local communities we serve. Over 23% of our company's federal subcontracting dollars have been to these types of businesses. In 2019, GEO spent close to \$79 million on supplies and services provided by small disadvantaged businesses and women-owned businesses, an increase of approximately 12 % from 2018.

GEO is also dedicated to employing Veterans, who comprise 11% of our current U.S. workforce, as well as supporting Veteran-owned businesses for which we spent approximately \$13 million on supplies and services in 2019.

We are particularly proud that, during these difficult and challenging times, we have maintained full employment for all of our employees and helped support the communities in which they live and work.

VII. Summary

COVID-19 has created and continues to create an unprecedented challenge for every citizen of our great country and we mourn for those we have lost to the pandemic.

The GEO Group has worked very aggressively with our clients, various health authorities and the local community to curb the spread of the coronavirus. We continue to adapt and remain vigilant as we learn more about this contagion. We stand steadfast and take very seriously our responsibility to care for every person who has been entrusted to us.

I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and look forward to answering any questions you may have.