Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 2, 2025

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20528

Todd M. Lyons
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Secretary Noem and Acting Director Lyons,

We are writing to strongly condemn the Trump Administration's deeply troubling decision to rapidly establish a makeshift unsafe, unsanitary, overly crowded, and environmentally destructive migrant detention facility in the Florida Everglades and diverting taxpayer funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Shelter and Services Program to accomplish this cruel and inhumane stunt.

This detention center, callously dubbed "Alligator Alcatraz" by Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier, intentionally exploits the hazardous natural conditions of the Everglades, threatening migrants with exposure to deadly wildlife and harsh weather conditions.[1] This kind of cruel rhetoric and deliberate endangerment further exemplifies the administration's shameful, dehumanizing approach to immigration – an approach rooted in anti-immigrant hostility that is morally indefensible and in clear violation of fundamental human rights.

Detainees will be kept in tents with inadequate sanitation facilities and will face unbearable living conditions, including exposure to deadly pathogens, constant threats from unpredictable flooding and extreme weather events, and daily temperatures averaging 90 degrees, with a heat index often over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Recent reporting indicates that this new detention center is being established on the site of the Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport, deep within the heart of the Everglades – known as being one of the most dangerous and inhospitable environments in the United States.[2] This remote swamp is notorious for oppressive heat, relentless humidity, severe storms, and perilous terrain infested with venomous snakes, disease-carrying insects, and large predatory wildlife, including alligators and crocodiles. The intentional remote placement of this detention center makes it nearly impossible for separated family members and children to visit their detained loved ones, legal counsel to meet with their clients, and elected officials to provide oversight of the encampment. The deliberate placement of vulnerable immigrants into such a hostile and lethal environment is morally reprehensible, inherently cruel, and starkly violates basic humanitarian standards. To be clear, the vast majority of individuals navigating our broken immigration system have not committed any crimes, and this inhumane treatment is unjustifiable by any measure.

Additionally, we are deeply opposed to the redirection of funds earmarked for humanitarian assistance to fuel mass detention and deportation initiatives – particularly by leveraging emergency powers. This is not just cruel, but it also represents an alarming misuse of taxpayer money. FEMA's budget should not serve as a vehicle for punitive and inhumane immigration enforcement policies, and instead should remain dedicated to genuine humanitarian and disaster response purposes.

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[1] ABC News. (2025, June 25). Florida AG proposes "Alligator Alcatraz" migrant detention center in Everglades. ABC News. Retrieved from https://abcnews.go.com/US/florida-attorney-general-proposes-alligator-alcatraz-migrant-detention/story?id=123149898

[2] NPR. (2025, June 24). What to know about "Alligator Alcatraz," Florida's migrant detention center in the Everglades. NPR. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2025/06/24/nx-s1-5443268/alligator-alcatraz-florida-everglades-migrant-detention-center

Furthermore, establishing a detention facility within the Everglades, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and critically important ecological reserve, represents a reckless disregard for environmental protections. It risks irreversible damage to this unique ecosystem, including the displacement of native wildlife and the destruction of delicate wetlands.

Given these serious concerns, we demand that your departments:

1. Immediately suspend construction and all planning activities related to the "Alligator Alcatraz" facility.
2. Provide a detailed, transparent accounting of federal funds reallocated to this project, including FEMA's role and rationale behind the diversion of Shelter and Services Program funds.
3. Publicly disavow the cruel use of hostile environments as a method of immigration deterrence.
4. Explicitly state whether the tents immigrants will be housed in have air conditioning, running potable water, and flushing toilets.
5. Commit to the humane treatment of detainees at all detention facilities, and ensure this standard is upheld through regular, unannounced inspections conducted by appropriate oversight entities, such as the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL), and by facilitating access for independent bodies like the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), including at privately operated or contracted facilities.

Turning America's immigration policy into a tool of deliberate cruelty diminishes our nation's values and international standing. We urge that you and the administration abandon this misguided and harmful approach. We request your prompt written response outlining the immediate steps the U.S. Department of Homeland Security will take in response to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Janelle S. Bynum
Member of Congress

Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

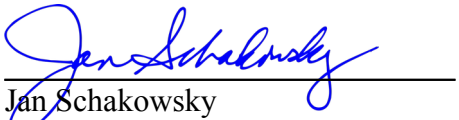
Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress

Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress

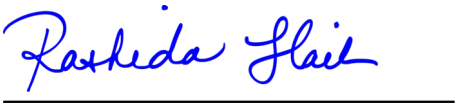
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

André Carson
Member of Congress

Sarah Elfreth
Member of Congress

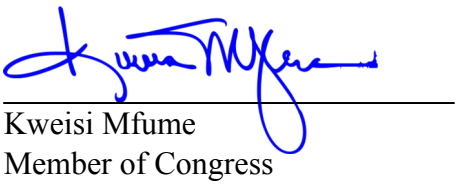


Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Kweisi Mfume
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Val Hoyle
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Jill Tokuda
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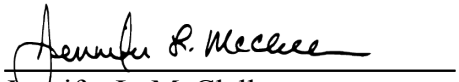
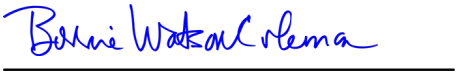


Jennifer L. McClellan
Member of Congress



Bonnie Watson Coleman
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Nikema Williams
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Dwight Evans
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Jesús G. "Chuy" García
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