



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 17, 2022

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**ADVOCATES JOIN 56 HUNGER STRIKERS IN ORANGE COUNTY ICE DETENTION
IN THEIR DEMANDS FOR HEALTHIER CONDITIONS, REMOVAL OF RACIST
GUARDS & IMMEDIATE RELEASES**

GOSHEN, NY— Fifty-six people detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at Orange County Jail (OCJ) in Goshen, NY, began a hunger strike on Wednesday, February 16, 2022, in protest of the deplorable conditions and treatment they are experiencing. Advocates from the Abolish ICE NY-NJ Coalition are amplifying the hunger strikers' demands for healthy meals, the termination of racist guards, and for the immediate release of everyone detained at OCJ.

“On Wednesday morning, we didn't take breakfast and we won't eat until our demands are met. Dogs eat better than we do. We are all sick to our stomach from eating the rotten food they serve us. We hope that the public can hear our demands to let us go back to our families and end this torture we face from the guards, medical neglect and moldy food,” **said a hunger striker detained at OCJ who requested anonymity.**

Details about the abuses and conditions at Orange County are outlined in a recently filed [Civil Rights and Civil Liberties complaint](#). In addition to the latest reports of unsafe and unhealthy conditions in this ICE detention center, immigrants at OCJ have reported unmet requests for vaccines and boosters, lack of medical care, an inability to safely quarantine, and inadequate PPE supplies amidst an outbreak of COVID-19. Earlier this week a sprinkler system flooded a dorm, leaving people for hours in soaking wet clothes and with destroyed possessions.

“A hunger strike is a political act and an extremely personal one—that's what makes it so powerful. The people on hunger strike at OCJ are jeopardizing their health and safety to show us that medical neglect, abusive treatment, and deplorable conditions are the status quo and that it cannot continue. The jail and ICE must meet the hunger strikers' immediate demands and New York State must pass the Dignity Not Detention Act so that we can make ICE detention a thing of the past,” **said Tania Mattos, director of advocacy and policy at Envision Freedom Fund.**

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“**The Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services, and Legal Aid Society** are in solidarity with incarcerated people on a hunger strike at Orange County Correctional Facility. As legal service providers in the NYIFUP coalition, we bear witness to the detrimental impact of immigration detention on the health and safety of the people we serve. People are protesting years of dehumanizing conditions, mistreatments, and medical neglect inside the jail by taking on this courageous act. As these conditions reach a breaking point, we implore local and federal officials to improve conditions at Orange County Correctional Facility and prioritize the immediate release of incarcerated people.”

“ICE detention centers, like all jails and prisons, are replete with survivors of violence and abuse. This abuse is then replicated at the hands of correctional officers, the police, sheriffs, elected officials passing ICE detention policies on the local, state, and federal levels, and many more. In the midst of torturous treatment from guards and extreme medical neglect during a global pandemic, the detained folks at OCJ are on hunger strike to bring attention to these conditions and to demand for their freedom. These hunger strikers need their communities, not cages. We must free them all and end all ICE detention for good,” **said Heena Sharma, an organizer with Survived and Punished NY.**

The Abolish ICE NY-NJ Coalition supports the demands of the hunger strikers to address inhumane conditions immediately at OCJ and for the release of all detained immigrants. Additionally, the coalition calls on New York legislators to end the state’s contracts with ICE through passage of the Dignity Not Detention Act and the New York For All Act in order to end state and local cooperation with ICE’s targeting of immigrants.

Background

Hunger strikes in ICE detention have happened nationwide, especially in the last two years, as immigration detention has been publicly exposed as rife with medical neglect, abusive practices, and as a public health risk to those inside as well as those outside during the COVID-19 pandemic. The cruelty of this inhumane system of detention, separation, and deportation flourished under Trump and continues under the Biden administration. The Abolish ICE coalition worked with hunger strikers in all four of New Jersey’s ICE detention centers in Essex, Hudson, and Bergen counties (all now closed) and the Elizabeth Detention Center, run by private, for-profit company CoreCivic.

The Abolish ICE NY-NJ Coalition envisions an end to detention, ICE, jails, prisons, and policies that criminalize immigrants, specifically focused on New York and New Jersey. The coalition is made up of the following organizations: Envision Freedom Fund, Borderless Existence Initiative, Critical Resistance NYC Chapter, Central Jersey DSA, Center for Constitutional Rights, Doctors for Camp Closure, Freedom for Immigrants, Freedom To Thrive, New York State Youth Leadership Council, NYU Law Immigrant Rights Clinic, NYC Democratic Socialists of America, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice, North Jersey Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), Queer Detainee Empowerment Project, Drew Roosevelt Institute, Solidarity & Mutual Aid Jersey City, Survived & Punished NY, Unitarian Universalist Faith Action New Jersey and more.

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