

November 25, 2009

Senator Kirsten E. Gillibrand  
Russell Senate Office Building, SR-478  
Washington, DC 20510-3203  
Fax: (202) 228-0282

**Re: Asylum Seekers and Detention**

Dear Senator Gillibrand:

The pilgrims arrived on these shores almost 400 years ago in search of religious freedom. Centuries later, the Thanksgiving holiday reminds us to honor the core freedoms that continue to make the United States a place of hope and safety for refugees fleeing religious, political and other forms of persecution. The undersigned represent 43 faith-based, human rights, refugee assistance and other organizations and individuals that provide legal counsel or social services to, or advocate on behalf of, asylum seekers who are detained in U.S. immigration detention facilities. During this Thanksgiving season, we write to thank you for your leadership in promoting key principles of detention reform through your co-sponsorship of the Protect Citizens and Residents from Unlawful Detention Act (S. 1549), introduced in July 2009.

The Department of Homeland Security's recent announcements of its planned reforms to the immigration detention system are promising signs, but they omit crucial due process and accountability measures. Such measures would help ensure that asylum seekers are not held in detention if they do not pose a risk of flight or danger to others. We believe that reforms to the United States' unjust immigration detention system must be mandated by law.

The Protect Citizens and Residents from Unlawful Detention Act establishes a number of procedural protections for immigrants in detention with special provisions for "vulnerable populations," including asylum seekers. Of particular significance to asylum seekers, it would:

- Expand parole opportunities for vulnerable populations subject to detention and provide access for all asylum seekers to custody determinations by an immigration judge, which currently does not exist;
- Reform existing alternatives to detention programs and restrict use of electronic monitoring devices on vulnerable groups; and
- Establish oversight of DHS enforcement actions by creating an Immigration and Customs Enforcement Ombudsman.

We encourage you to continue to support key principles of detention reform so that this country lives up to the commitments it has made to protect the persecuted – rather than greeting them with handcuffs and prisons. Not only are basic due process safeguards – like providing court review of a decision to detain a person – called for under international human rights and refugee protection standards, but they are also consistent with core American values. Congress has a responsibility to bring U.S. practice in line with human rights standards and this country’s best values – and to uphold the United States’ historic commitment to protection of asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups.

Thank you for leading the way. Wishing you a peaceful and safe Thanksgiving holiday.

Sincerely,

**New York/New Jersey Groups**

American Association of Jews from the Former USSR, Inc.  
New York, NY

Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture  
New York, NY

Catholic Charities Community Services  
New York, NY

Center for Social Justice  
Seton Hall University School of Law  
Newark, NJ

Chinatown Manpower Project, Inc.  
Refugee/Asylee Program  
New York, NY

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society  
New York, NY

Human Rights First  
New York, NY

Immigration Equality  
New York, NY

Interfaith Refugee Action Team & First Friends  
Elizabeth, NJ

New York Immigration Coalition  
New York, NY

Riverside Church Sojourners Immigration Detention Visitor Project  
New York, NY

Sanctuary for Families  
New York, NY

Women's Refugee Commission  
New York, NY

**National Groups**

ACLU-Vermont  
Montpelier, VT

Advocates for Human Rights  
Minneapolis, MN

American Immigration Lawyers Association  
Washington, DC

American Jewish Committee  
Washington, DC

Asian Law Caucus  
San Francisco, CA

Catholic Charities Hawaii  
Honolulu, HI

Center for Gender and Refugee Studies  
Hastings College of the Law  
San Francisco, CA

Center for Victims of Torture  
Minneapolis, MN

The Episcopal Church  
Washington, DC

Friends Committee on National Legislation  
Washington, DC

Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights  
Atlanta, GA

Hawaii Immigrant Justice Center  
Honolulu, HI

Hawaii Interpreter Action Network  
Honolulu, HI

Institute for Redress and Recovery  
Santa Clara, CA

Institute for the Study of Psychosocial Trauma  
Palo Alto, CA

International Institute of Connecticut, Inc.  
Bridgeport, CT

Jubilee Campaign USA  
Fairfax, VA

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service  
Baltimore, MD

National Immigrant Justice Center  
Chicago, IL

National Immigration Forum  
Washington, DC

Northwest Immigrant Rights Project  
Seattle, WA

South Asian Americans Leading Together  
Takoma Park, MD

Survivors International  
San Francisco, CA

Survivors of Torture, International  
San Diego, CA

Tahirih Justice Center  
Falls Church, VA  
Houston, TX

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society  
Washington, DC

World Relief  
Baltimore, MD

**Individuals**

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Center for Immigrants' Rights & Clinical Professor of Law  
Penn State Dickinson School of Law  
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Cc: Senator Akaka  
Senator Cornyn  
Senator Durbin  
Senator Feinstein  
Senator Grassley  
Senator Kyl  
Senator Leahy  
Senator Lieberman  
Senator Menendez  
Senator Sessions  
Senator Schumer  
Senator Whitehouse