



## DIOCESE OF CHEYENNE

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### **The Catholic Church Urges Untiring Resistance to Immigration Jail**

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Recently, Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) doubled the upper limit for an immigration detention center proposed to be built near Evanston, Wyoming. The maximum number of beds jumped from 500 to 1,000. Some believe that this change may be due to several state and local governments cutting ties with ICE detention facilities or state legislatures passing bills to deter immigrant detention in Virginia, Texas, Michigan, Illinois and California.

It seems prudent for Wyoming's local and state officials to become better informed about issues regarding for-profit prisons by conferring with those who are knowledgeable about these institutions. They also should listen to the concerns of those who are living in the community in which this facility potentially could reside.

The Catholic Church promotes faithful citizenship, and we urge all people of good will to contribute to civil and respectful public dialogue. Everyone has a duty to weigh in on civic issues so as to promote the common good. It is a concrete way of loving our neighbor. We seek to uphold our dual heritage as both faithful Catholics and American citizens with rights and duties as participants in the civil order.

The Catholic Church is gravely concerned about the practice of long-term and large-scale detention of undocumented adult immigrants and their families within the U.S. The church has a long history of supporting the dignity and rights of all immigrants. We view immigrant detention centers from the perspective of our biblical tradition, which calls us to act with justice toward persons on the margins of society, including strangers and imprisoned persons. Because of our long experience as a pilgrim people, we know what it is like to be uprooted, persecuted and imprisoned. Most of our ancestors came to this country to achieve a better life.

Jesus Christ commanded us to imitate his love; thus, he calls us to protect the rights of refugees, to promote the reunification of families and to honor the inherent dignity of all migrants, whatever their status. Regrettably, the U.S. immigrant detention system represents a far cry from loving solidarity. It divides us from our migrant brothers and sisters and separates families. We are particularly concerned about detaining young migrant mothers and fathers with their children. This response from our nation to their flight from violence or persecution violates human dignity and human rights. Children are dying; seven of them, in fact, met their demise while in U.S. custody.

This is not to say that the Catholic Church does not acknowledge the role of the government in ensuring public safety. We agree that those who are a threat to our communities should be detained. Mandatory detention, however, contributes to the misconception that all immigrants are criminals and a threat to our nation's unity, security and well-being. It engenders despair, divides

families, causes asylum-seekers to relive trauma, leads many to forfeit their legal claims and fails to treat all immigrants with respect.

Current immigrant detention policies are costly, inhumane and destructive to families. Many immigrants are held in immigration detention centers away from their families and communities, so they are unable to access legal assistance or other support. In fact, 81 percent of the individuals currently in detention lack legal representation. Certainly, appropriate legal representation is not readily available in Evanston, Wyoming. That location also separates those detained there from families and any meaningful support system.

We must reject proposals to expand this inhumane immigrant detention system and efforts to curtail existing protections for children and their families. If our public officials are willing to secure this vital issue of human rights, then we are hopeful that migrants, regardless of their legal status, will be treated with dignity and compassion when they arrive to our country. Ignoring an issue regarding such grave violations of human dignity is not an option, and rhetoric that attacks the human rights and dignity of the migrant is unfitting of any country, especially a nation of immigrants.

Wyoming's contribution to the immigration problem should not be to remain silent. Issues surrounding immigration today demand everyone's civic participation. This is especially true for our legislators, but all people have a responsibility to speak out. For-profit prisons are only one symptom of a larger issue that must be addressed by the federal government. Often action at the federal level is driven when citizens at the local level raise their voices.

I encourage all people of good will to express their opposition to the proposed immigration jail by signing petitions or by writing letters to the Uinta County Commissioners. I also encourage all concerned citizens to communicate with Wyoming's elected officials to express their opinions against this for-profit prison.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Biegler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steven Biegler

Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Cheyenne