



Immigration and COVID-19

April 14, 2020

The National Latinx Psychological Association (NLPA) represents over 600 psychologists and affiliated health professionals. The mission of NLPA is to advance psychological education and training, science, practice, and organizational change to enhance the health, mental health, and well-being of Latinxs through its community of professionals. To that end, we call for policy makers to consider the immediate release of individuals detained in ICE facilities as an effective measure to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus and prevent loss of life.

Amid the COVID-19 public health crisis, all detained immigrants are currently at risk, especially those with chronic health conditions, disabilities, are older, and/or are pregnant. Individuals in ICE detention centers, including staff, will inevitably end up in emergency rooms around the country, further straining our healthcare system and increasing the risk for everyone, not just detained immigrants. The moment is urgent to significantly reduce the number of people in immigration detention centers. Failing to do so will result in an unnecessary, and preventable, humanitarian crisis. Detention centers are often overcrowded and lack basic sanitation supplies, with no way of practicing social distancing that may mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

The *Remain in Mexico* policy, allows the current administration to send tens of thousands of people seeking refuge to some of the most dangerous parts of Mexico, where they are currently forced to live in unsafe, unsanitary, and inhumane conditions in open-air encampments and shelters that endanger their health and safety along the U.S.-Mexico border. The threat of COVID-19 in these tent-encampments is real and will spread like wildfire upon its arrival.

The law allows ICE to use broad discretion to release individuals in its custody, including those who are medically vulnerable, and use alternatives to detention. We are urgently calling on ICE to release vulnerable individuals in order to reduce the number of people in detention to stem further spread within ICE facilities and provide COVID-19 preventive measures in the tent-encampments situated along the U.S.-Mexico border.

We demand the administration uphold U.S. refugee laws and treaties while implementing measures, with the guidance and involvement of public health, refugee assistance, medical and mental health professionals. All outbreak response measures should be based on data and best practices in public health. Scientific and medical research indicates that social distancing and home isolation are the most effective measures in limiting the spread of the outbreak; there is no evidence that a ban on asylum seekers would improve public health. Governments can respond to the pandemic with border policies that preserve the right to seek asylum and protect public health through non-discriminatory screening and self-isolation measures that avoid the use of detention.