



City of Tacoma

City Council

September 10, 2024

The Honorable Derek Kilmer
United States Representative
1410 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Kilmer,

We are writing to ask for your assistance with ensuring the incoming Representative for Washington's 6th District is informed about the Tacoma City Council's concerns regarding the Northwest Immigration and Customs Enforcement Processing Center (NWIPC). We also wanted to express our gratitude for all you have done to advocate for reform and transparency at this facility during your time in office. It is our sincere hope that you will help prepare the incoming Representative to continue your hard work so that they can assist us with ensuring the detainees housed in the NWIPC are treated with dignity and that their human rights are upheld.

We want to highlight some of the core concerns that we hope you will share with the incoming Representative. These concerns have been brought to our attention by local advocacy groups who are in touch with detainees in the NWIPC facility and reports by the University of Washington's Center for Human Rights. Many of these issues have been ongoing for more than a decade and have been identified in formal written complaints. Some of these concerns also indicate violations of basic international human rights standards for detention.¹ Detainees have few actions they can take to improve these conditions independently at this facility, leading many of them to resort to hunger strikes that put their health and well-being at grave risk.

¹ [Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 17 December 2015, United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.](#)

- **Poor Standard of Living:** Detainees have reported difficult living conditions and a lack of sanitation in the kitchen and laundry facilities.² Detainees have also noted specific concerns regarding outbreaks of bed bugs, insufficient warm clothing, transparent shower curtains that leave detainees exposed, and broken footwear. Detainees reported earlier this year that the windows in the facility have been painted to block their ability to see outside or look at green space, resulting in mental health impacts.
- **Food and Water Insecurity:** Detainees consistently report that they are provided with unhealthy and insufficient amounts of food. Formal complaints include reports that food was either spoiled or uncooked.³ In addition, detainees have reported seeing rats and rat droppings in the kitchen and finding worms and maggots in their food. Detainees report that the water quality is poor and smells strongly of chemicals, so they do not want to drink it.
- **Insufficient Health Care:** Detainees have expressed concerns regarding their exposure to COVID-19. We often hear reports that there are not enough COVID tests at the facility, that guards are continuing to work when testing positive for COVID, and that there is a lack of space for isolating detainees who test positive. In addition, detainees report that they receive only Tylenol or Ibuprofen when coping with serious illness. Detainees also report that mental health services are lacking and that they receive only two or three meetings with a service provider with no patient confidentiality.
- **Excessive Use of Solitary Confinement:** The Center for Human Rights at the University of Washington revealed ICE documents in 2020 that confirm this facility holds people longer, on average, in solitary confinement than any other dedicated ICE facility in the country. In addition, ICE documents showed that people who are mentally ill are frequently subjected to solitary confinement. Since 2018, at least two detainees have died, including one by suicide, after experiencing prolonged solitary confinement.⁴⁵
- **Use of Force and Sexual Assault:** Detainees have shared that at least two detainees have reportedly been sexually assaulted by guards at the facility. Female detainees have also reported that they face unexplained physical searches. Detainees report difficulties contacting police directly to report incidents and that guards are minimizing the impact of reported incidents to local authorities.
- **Lack of Access to Communication:** Low-income detainees report being unable to afford the private, for-profit phone service to place phone calls, leading to reduced access to legal support and poor mental and emotional health impacts from a lack of contact with friends and family.

² [NWDC Conditions Research Update: Three Years of Cleanliness Concerns, No Consequences - Center for Human Rights \(washington.edu\)](https://www.washington.edu/centerforhumanrights/research-reports/nwdc-conditions-research-update-three-years-of-cleanliness-concerns-no-consequences)

³ [Conditions at the NWDC: Sanitation of Food & Laundry - Center for Human Rights \(washington.edu\)](https://www.washington.edu/centerforhumanrights/research-reports/conditions-at-the-nwdc-sanitation-of-food-laundry)

⁴ [10.23.19 NWDC Letter To DHS Inspector General.pdf \(senate.gov\)](https://www.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/10.23.19_nwdc_letter_to_dhs_inspector_general.pdf)

⁵ [Letter Solitary Confinement in Immigration Detention 3.29.24 \(senate.gov\)](https://www.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/letter_solitary_confinement_in_immigration_detention_3.29.24)

- **Inadequate Legal Representation:** Detainees have reported a need for greater access to legal representation, especially for low-income individuals. Detainees also report problems securing bonds and that only three percent of the requests are fulfilled.

The City of Tacoma has limited authority to intervene at the NWIPC because it is privately owned, and we depend on state and federal involvement to help ensure that this facility is complying with national standards for keeping detainees safe and healthy. It is of paramount importance that our federal partners continue to help us seek greater transparency and reform. We have worked hard at the City level to advocate for state legislation, including HB 1470 concerning private detention facility standards, and we are currently serving on the Department of Health's Rules Committee to ensure change at the state level.

We are grateful for any assistance you can provide in ensuring that the incoming Representative is aware of these serious concerns and our need for federal assistance. Thank you again for your partnership and your efforts to ensure the safety and well-being of all our community members in Tacoma.

Thank you,

[Council signatures to be added pending approval]