

Proposed Resolution – City of Tacoma
Public Health Crisis, COVID-19, and NWIPC

WHEREAS, the Mayor and of the City of Tacoma, Washington, as the governing authority, is empowered to provide for the health, safety, and welfare of the residents including those in detention and correctional facilities, employees, businesses, and visitors within the City; and

WHEREAS the Northwest ICE Processing Center (NWIPC) is a 1,575 bed facility, privately owned and operated by GEO Group, Inc. on behalf of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and is located in the City of Tacoma, inside a Port Maritime Industrial District that is not currently zoned for long-term residence or detention; and

WHEREAS US ICE has the power to parole and/or set bonds for those who are detained at NWIPC to be released and continue their cases in non-detained immigration courts; and

WHEREAS sites of confinement such as jails and prisons are especially susceptible to disease outbreaks, and NWIPC has a history of outbreaks such as Mumps and Varicella in 2018 and 2019; and

WHEREAS the detention center has had a history of allegations and complaints of [medical negligence](#) and [poor sanitation](#).

WHEREAS the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 has spread to the point of being a global pandemic, and virologists and epidemiologists are not able to predict how long it will take to subside; and

WHEREAS there is [evidence](#) that the pandemic is deadlier and spreads faster in conditions of confinement such as cruise ships, nursing homes and, by extension, prisons; and

WHEREAS there are people inside NWIPC who are susceptible to [the severest and deadliest symptoms](#) of COVID-19, including age, diabetes, heart disease, and compromised immune systems. The risk of an outbreak at NWIPC would be especially devastating and potentially fatal for these groups of people; and

WHEREAS, the grouping of people inside jails, prison, and detention centers puts the collective health of the City of Tacoma at risk. Facility staff and people newly detained or

recently transferred can spark outbreaks by bringing the virus into facilities, while staff can take it back to their communities when they go home; and

WHEREAS people in detention at NWIPC have reported to the [media](#) that social distancing is not practiced, Personal Protective Equipment is not widely available, soap is not widely available, and COVID-19 testing is not available inside the detention center; and

WHEREAS people in detention at NWIPC have protested these conditions and the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak in detention, and their own lack of control over their exposure to risk through [hunger strikes](#) and [visual protest](#) in the yard, forming the letters SOS with their bodies; and

WHEREAS ICE has refused to be transparent about its public health practices following inquiries from the City, the Governor of the State of Washington, and members of Washington's federal delegation such as Rep. Adam Smith and Senator Maria Cantwell, and [evidently has no plan](#) for the eventuality of an outbreak in the detention center; and

WHEREAS Senator Corey Booker and Representative Pramila Jayapal have introduced the Federal Immigrant Release for Safety and Security Act ([FIRST Act](#)), which would mandate the release of all those individuals younger than 21 years of age, older than 50 years, or with a listed health condition that makes them vulnerable to COVID-19. The act also established the presumption of release barring serious public safety concerns regarding all others; and

WHEREAS the City of Tacoma declared itself a Welcoming City to immigrants and refugees in Resolution 39116 in February 2015.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TACOMA:

Hereby expresses its support for those detained at the Northwest ICE Processing Center located in Tacoma, who are unable to protect themselves from the COVID-19 pandemic while in detention.

The City of Tacoma recommends the Tacoma Pierce County Health Department require testing of all individuals who have signs and symptoms of COVID-19 in detention and correctional facilities.

The City of Tacoma endorses the Federal Immigrant Release for Safety and Security Act (FIRST Act), and calls for the systematic release under parole and bond of all those detained at the

Northwest ICE Processing Center, and the suspension of business at the facility, for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.