

The Form for Filing Resolutions

From: The Rev. Dan Krutz

Purpose: Care of Immigrants detained in LA prisons

Resolved that the 182nd Convention adopt and communicate the accompanying Statement on Vast Expansion of Immigrant Detention in Louisiana to corrections officials where detainees are being held.

Statement of the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana gathered at Convention, Christ Episcopal School, November 1-2, 2019 on Vast Expansion of Immigrant Detention in Louisiana

Because of our commitment to upholding the dignity of human life and our recognition that redemption and forgiveness are core principles of our Christian faith, we welcomed with great joy news earlier this year that the total number of persons imprisoned in Louisiana in 2018 was almost 19% lower than its peak on 2012.i

However, our relief and gratitude that our state has begun to reduce the number of Louisianans sent to prison soon turned to shock and disappointment when we learned that newly empty prison beds are now being used, through local agreements with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, to detain vast numbers of immigrants.ii Many of these immigrants are asylum seekers who requested refuge at our nation's southern border or long-time residents ensnared in ramped-up ICE enforcement efforts, including fathers and mothers arrested in August during massive worksite raids in Mississippi. Many public and private prison facilities have contracted with ICE to detain immigrants located in areas of the state distant from the love and support of detained immigrants' families and communities as well as immigration attorneys, who are essential in assisting immigrants negotiate our nation's daunting and complex immigration legal system.

The Church has a duty and responsibility to call attention to the moral consequences of actions taken by corrections officials. By agreeing to house the detainees that have resulted from ICE's vast expansion of immigrant detention in our state, it saddens us to say that Louisiana prison officials, public and private, may be unwitting partners in denying asylum seekers meaningful opportunities to request asylum and contributing to the separation of hard-working immigrants from their families.

For officials in both public and private prison facilities that have contracted with ICE to detain immigrants, we pray that you recognize how the location of your facilities,

far away from established immigrant communities, makes attorney and family visits extremely difficult. We ask that you please work to provide the most generous visiting hours possible for family members and attorneys, allow attorneys to make copies of legal documents at your facilities, and ensure reasonable costs for phone calls and commissary items. It is extremely important that an adequate number of trained bilingual interpreters fluent in the languages spoken by the detained immigrants be hired to facilitate communication between prison personnel and immigrants. Officials at county jails on the East Coast that detain immigrants have allocated portions of the funds collected from ICE to pay for immigration legal representation.ⁱⁱⁱ This should also be done in Louisiana as well. We in turn will encourage community members affiliated with our churches who live near immigrant detention centers to visit detained immigrants, helping to bring them the Word of God, friendship, and support.

We hope and pray prison officials will reconsider their involvement in detaining immigrants and instead re-focus time and talent on the noble mission of law enforcement work, to serve and protect local communities and promote the common good.

i Toohey, G. (2019, June 27). Louisiana sees large drop in prison population a year after historic criminal justice reforms. *The Advocate* at https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/crime_police/article_a5c01e10-7ad9-11e8-856e-ebf326bf26bc.html

ii Lanard, N. (2019, August 22). Congress told ICE to detain fewer people. Instead it keeps adding private prisons. *Mother Jones* at <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2019/08/congress-ice-louisiana-mississippi-private-prisons/>

iii Alvarado, M. (2019, September 3) New Jersey, New York county jails billed ICE \$87M in 2018 to house detainees, *North Jersey Record* at <https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/new-jersey-new-york-county-jails-billed-ice-87-m-2018-house-detainees/1545725001/>