

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 1, 2019

Matthew T. Albence  
Acting Director  
U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
500 12th St., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20536

Acting Director Albence:

We are gravely concerned regarding Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) policies for individuals seeking asylum in the United States. Today, we write to express our strong concerns with ICE's treatment of transgender migrants seeking asylum in the United States, especially those coming to the U.S. from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. We urge ICE to seriously consider the asylum claims of transgender migrants who demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution based on their "membership in a particular social group" and adhere to its own policies regulating the treatment of transgender detainees.

Violence against the transgender community occurs at alarming rates in the Northern Triangle countries. Forced displacement of transgender people continues to escalate as a direct effect of this violence because of a lack of tolerance and understanding in their communities. Transgender communities – overwhelmingly poor and without access to social and economic development – have even less capacity to respond to threats of extortion and violence. With no legal framework to address forced displacement, public institutions are overwhelmed by the demand to support an ever-growing number of victims. In El Salvador, at least seven transgender women were killed in a five-month period in 2017. In Honduras, at least 97 transgender people have been murdered since 2009. And in Guatemala, five transgender women were killed in a two-month span in 2016. In such precarious situations, many transgender people are left with no other options but to flee their countries.

In some cases, transgender women have been murdered after they were deported once their asylum claims were denied. For example, reports indicate that Camila Díaz Córdova, a 31-year-old El Salvadoran, was kidnapped and beaten before she died on February 3, 2019 at a hospital in San Salvador. This tragedy occurred after she was deported from the U.S. a few months earlier. Ms. Díaz Córdova received persistent death threats for years, which she had documented in her asylum application.

Most recently, we have received disturbing updates about the case of Alejandra Barrera. Ms. Barrera is a 44-year-old transgender woman from El Salvador who requested asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border in November 2017 and has been held in detention by ICE ever since. Despite documented health conditions that require specialized care, she remains at the Cibola County Correctional Center in Milan, New Mexico, and has been denied humanitarian parole five times. As you continue to review these cases, we ask that you seriously consider the sensitive nature of these requests for asylum and grant humanitarian parole for Ms. Barrera and others who are similarly situated.

Transgender migrants face persecution and violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. We ask that you honor the longstanding reputation of the United States as a safe refuge for individuals who face this deplorable treatment. Specifically, we ask that you bring ICE into compliance with its stated policy for the treatment of transgender detainees. We further ask that you take tangible steps to protect the legal rights of transgender individuals who meet the necessary criteria to be considered for asylum.

Sincerely,



FRANK PALLONE, JR.  
Member of Congress



DEB HAALAND  
Member of Congress



BRIAN HIGGINS  
Member of Congress



CHRIS PAPPAS  
Member of Congress



JASON CROW  
Member of Congress



BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN  
Member of Congress



ERIC SWALWELL  
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ALBIO SIRES  
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ALAN LOWENTHAL  
Member of Congress



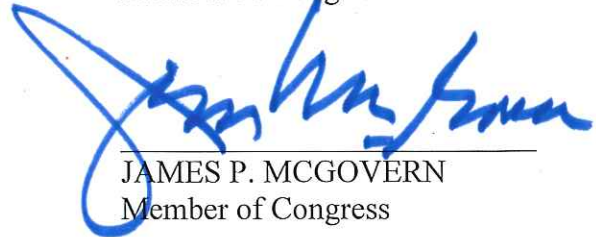
JAMIE RASKIN  
Member of Congress



MARK TAKANO  
Member of Congress



HARLEY ROUDA  
Member of Congress

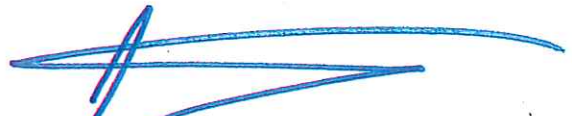


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