

Menendez on Family Detention Announcement

Thursday, May 14, 2015

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ) today issued the following statement after U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced a series of changes to improve oversight of family detention centers for immigrant families.

“The announcement that the Administration will implement enhanced oversight for family detention centers after the drastic expansion of family detention over the past year is deeply disappointing. The Administration’s efforts simply do not go far enough and are an unacceptable response to adequately address the grave concerns of detaining women and children. This is a wrong response to the serious concerns raised by faith leaders, human rights experts, immigration groups and Members of Congress. Suggesting an Advisory Committee is a timid reaction to a deeply-seeded problem of treating women and children like criminals.

“It is unacceptable to keep family detention as an automatic default for immigrant families. This policy is a disservice to those that are fleeing violence and do not represent a flight risk or pose any danger to our national security. The fact remains that we must stop acting like there are practical reasons for locking up women and children, especially when the negative mental health repercussions are abysmal.

“Our efforts should be directed at apprehending real criminals or those who pose a national security threat to the United States. Instead we are blindly funneling families into privately-owned detention centers and paying for it with taxpayer dollars.

“Put simply, there is no humane way to detain women and children. Detention should be used only as a last resort and I will continue to do everything I can to get the Administration to rethink this misguided policy and change course.”

Limiting the use of family detention centers has been one of Senator Menendez’s priorities. In October 16, 2014, he was part of a group of 10 Senators who sent a letter to Secretary Johnson expressing concerns over a decision to build a new 2,400 bed immigration detention facility for women and children in Dilley, Texas. More recently, in a March 31, 2015 to leaders of the Senate Subcommittee on Homeland Security, Senator Menendez requested specific bill language and report language on the exorbitant use and cost of family detention centers.

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