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09.14.20

SENATORS ANNOUNCE GAO INVESTIGATION OF TRUMP POLITICIZATION OF IMMIGRATION COURTS AS COVID-19 CRISIS RAGES

Whitehouse, Durbin, Hirono applaud GAO review of troubling Trump-Sessions-Barr mismanagement of immigration judicial process

Washington, DC – Senators Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Dick Durbin (D-IL), and Mazie Hirono (D-HI) announced today that the top congressional watchdog will investigate the practices of the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) under President Donald Trump, including its management of immigration courts during the current COVID-19 pandemic. In August, the senators led a request for review of the EOIR by the Government Accountability Office (GAO). They first voiced concerns to Attorney General William Barr in February – concerns that went unanswered. The senators issued the following statement:

“We welcome review of President Trump and his Attorney Generals’ mishandling of an important component of our immigration system. We’ve heard alarming accounts of the Executive Office for Immigration Review making procedural changes to tip the scales of justice against immigrants. COVID-19 rages in this country, and yet the Department plows ahead with a process that forces people into in-person proceedings without sufficient safeguards and keeps them in unsafe detention facilities with limited access to counsel. A thorough GAO investigation will help to shed light on the troubling politicization and mismanagement of our immigration system.”

The Trump administration’s management of the immigration system has come under close scrutiny during the COVID-19 crisis. Reports suggest immigrants face a range of unsafe conditions and practices as a result of Trump administration management decisions, including the detention of children using unaccountable private contractors, and health and safety risks to immigrants, judges, and other court personnel. Over 5,600 cases of COVID-19 had been reported inside ICE facilities as of September 10, 2020, and six people have died.

Joining Whitehouse, Durbin, and Hirono in the request to the GAO were Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Chris Coons (D-DE), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Cory Booker (D-NJ), and Kamala Harris (D-CA).