

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pennsylvania Department of Human Services Sued for Allowing the Berks County Detention Center to Continue to Operate

Philadelphia - Four years after the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (PA DHS) revoked the Berks County Detention Center's license to operate, a new lawsuit has been filed against PA DHS for continuing to allow Berks County to detain migrant families.

It has been four years since PA DHS revoked the license for the Berks County Family Detention Center (BCRC) because the detention of children violates Pennsylvania law. Since this initial license revocation in 2016, Berks County has applied for new licenses each subsequent year. Instead of denying these licenses, PA DHS has continued to allow the detention center to operate. We demand that PA DHS be held accountable for its duty to protect all children in Pennsylvania.

WHAT: *Press Conference held by the Shut Down Berks Coalition detailing the lawsuit against Pennsylvania Department of Human Services*

WHEN: *Thursday, February 20th, 2020, 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.*

WHERE: *Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, 1515 Arch St. (16th St. entrance), Philadelphia*

WHO: *Shut Down Berks Coalition, Temple University Sheller Center for Social Justice, PICC, Free Migration Project, CASA, Sunrise Berks*

During this four-year period when PA DHS has allowed to the Berks Detention Center to remain open, there has been case after case of medical neglect and mistreatment:

- In May 2016, a three-year-old boy who had been suffering from fevers and loss of appetite for months was finally [diagnosed with an intestinal parasitism](#) after his mother found a worm in his diaper.
- In February 2018, the prison held at least [two families in medical isolation](#) without substantial evidence to do so. In one instance, a Haitian father and his 3-year-old son were quarantined for two weeks. In another case, a Haitian mother and her 3-year-old son were isolated for more than five days.
- In April 2018, a [15-year-old girl was detained at Berks alongside her father for 32 days](#). While there, she was the only female in what was otherwise an all-male facility.

- In [2019 a British family was held with their unvaccinated 3-month-old baby](#) in freezing conditions at Berks.
- Most recently a [7-year-old girl is now entering her seventh month in detention and has been communicating about her depression for months.](#)

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services has failed to protect immigrant children and families by allowing the continued detention of families. However, PA DHS is not unique in its failure to address this inhumane detention within our state. Governor Wolf has also side-stepped responsibility by failing to issue an Emergency Removal Order (ERO) and demanding ICE stop using this facility for family detention.

It is time for Pennsylvania to stand up for children and close this inhumane detention center.

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*The **Shut Down Berks Coalition** is a group of organizations and individuals fighting to close the Berks family prison in Pennsylvania and end the practice of imprisoning immigrant families in the U.S.*