

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Berks County Immigrant Prison Empty!

After an 8-year campaign to close the immigrant detention center outside of Reading, PA the facility is empty and the doors are set to close permanently at the end of the month

Pennsylvania - On January 10th, 2023 the Berks County Detention Center in Leesport, PA ended the day with an empty facility and is anticipated to remain empty until its final closure on January 31st, 2023.

This is a victory for the immigrant community in Pennsylvania and beyond. After an 8-year campaign that began in 2015, when the 2014 sexual assault of a 19 year-old mother at Berks by a staff member sparked outrage among community members, the Shut Down Berks Coalition has demanded the permanent closure of the prison. **The Coalition celebrated the announcement on November 30th, 2022 that the prison's ICE contract with Berks County would terminate at the end of January, and now celebrates that this immigrant prison is finally empty and will close permanently.**

But we recognize that being incarcerated by ICE simply for migrating is the result of a system designed to criminalize and dehumanize immigrants. **The interconnected fights against deportations, detention and border militarization remain fundamental in the fight for immigrant liberation.**

We look now to the future as one for healing and care. Berks County organizations, including Make the Road PA, Berks Stands Up and Sunrise Berks, are in active conversations with local elected officials and community leaders about converting the facility to one that provides much needed health and human services to local residents. A long overdue demand from Berks County community members.

Today's closure is a victory for every person who has ever been incarcerated at the prison as well as everyone who wants to end a profit-making system that criminalizes and abuses immigrants. **Now is the time for President Biden to make good on his promise of a welcoming country.** Here in Pennsylvania that means also closing the Moshannon immigrant prison, located near State College. It means ending the ICE contract at Clinton County, Pennsylvania. And it means ending the ICE contract at Pike County which saw scores of people held by ICE exposed and positive with COVID during the pandemic lockdown. Incarcerating immigrants is merely a racist and xenophobic tactic to deter people from migrating.

We want to thank and honor the many women, men and children who were incarcerated at Berks and organized and fought for their freedom and the freedom for all communities. Without them, this campaign, and this win, would not be possible.

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*The **Shut Down Berks Coalition** is a group of organizations and individuals fighting to close the Berks immigrant prison in Leesport, PA.*

Quotes from Formerly Detained People and Immigrant Leaders

“This is such good news, no more traumas for children and adults in that place. I am very happy and add our family to your happiness. May God pour many blessings over your lives.”

Mr. H, father detained with 6 year old for 7 months

“Esta es una muy buena noticia, no más traumas para niños y adultos en ese lugar. Soy muy feliz y sumo a nuestra familia a su felicidad. Que Dios derrame muchas bendiciones sobre sus vidas.”

Sr. H, padre detenido con un niño de 6 años durante 7 meses

“There were 28 days of uncertainty and anguish with my son, where we had a false freedom, rules for everything we did and we didn't have the security of being able to talk to someone [while] inside Berks. We are happy that now they will have one less place to hold people and so [people] can move forward.”

Mr. A, father incarcerated with son for 1 month

“Fueron 28 días de incertidumbre y angustia con mi hijo, donde teníamos una falsa libertad, reglas para todo lo que hacíamos y no teníamos la seguridad de poder hablar con nadie [mientras estábamos] dentro de Berks. Estamos contentos de que ahora tendrán un lugar menos para detener a las personas y así [las personas] puedan salir adelante”.

Sr. A, padre encarcelado con su hijo durante 1 mes

“This victory feels like a dream. I feel happy, content, and free. Closing Berks detention center is the best thing that could have happened. I spent more than 1 month in detention and my sick daughter was never cared for or given the medicine she needed while I was in prison. This detention center created a lot of suffering, and I am overjoyed to see it finally close. The same freedom that I have [now] should be given to other immigrants in Pennsylvania and across the country”

CASA member, Liliana Perez. [Link to picture of Lilian and her children](#)

“Esta victoria se siente como un sueño. Me siento feliz, contenta y libre. Cerrar el centro de detención de Berks es lo mejor que podría haber pasado. Pasé más de 1 mes detenida y mi hija enferma nunca fue atendida ni le dieron los medicamentos que necesitaba mientras estuve en prisión. Este centro de detención generó mucho sufrimiento y estoy muy feliz de verlo finalmente cerrado. La misma libertad que tengo [ahora] debería dársele a otros inmigrantes en Pensilvania y en todo el país”

Liliana Pérez, integrante de CASA. [Enlace a la foto de Lilian y sus hijos](#)

“Thank God, today the victory is complete for us, and thanks to our attorneys who fought until the end”

J, a mother formerly detained with her teenage child at Berks for over 1 year

“Gracias a Dios hoy si la victoria es completa para nosotras y gracias a nuestras abogadas que lucharon hasta el final”

J, una madre anteriormente detenida con su hijo adolescente en Berks durante más de 1 año

For me it is a pleasure, the best news I have heard, happy to know that there will never again be families in Berks detention. No more depressed children locked up. Freedom is the most valuable thing that can be had, thanks to the support from everyone. Families should not arrive to be confined, no matter where they are from. I am more than happy that it will be closed down.”

Lorena, mother incarcerated with her son for nearly 2 years

“Para mi es un gusto, la mejor noticia que he escuchado, feliz de saber que nunca más habrán familias en la detención de Berks. No más niños encerrados y deprimidos. La libertad es lo más valioso que se puede tener, gracias al apoyo de todos. Las familias no deberían de venir a un encierro, sin importar de donde sean. Estoy más que feliz de que se cierre.”

Lorena, madre encarcelada con su hijo durante casi 2 años.

“I’m here to tell a small part of my story at the Berks facility. For me it was something very traumatic to spend so much time there, almost two years. I left with a lot of depression, to this day I am in therapy. I just thank God that this place [will] finally close, they don’t know the trauma of being locked up.”

Cristina, a mother formerly detained with her son at the Berks prison.

“Aquí vengo a contar una pequeña parte de mi historia en las instalaciones de Berks. Para mi fue algo muy traumático pasar tanto tiempo, casi dos años. De ahí salí con mucha depresión, hasta el día de hoy estoy en terapia. Solo doy gracias a Dios que por fin ese lugar estará cerrado, ellos no saben el trauma que es estar encerrado.”

Cristina, una madre anteriormente detenida con su hijo en la prisión de Berks.

“Thank God. I am so happy about everything.”

Karen, mother detained with her son for nearly 2 years

“Gracias a Dios. Estoy tan feliz por todo.”

Karen, madre detenida con su hijo durante casi 2 años.

“For years I’ve fought to end the incarceration of immigrants in my backyard, and today we celebrate freedom. This victory belongs to the immigrant families and women detained at Berks who shared their stories and demanded dignity, and to the organizers who never lost hope and never stopped fighting for immigrant families to be free and together. We took this fight from Berks County to Harrisburg and all the way to the White House, and I’m proud to say that organizing works. Today is a good day.”

Flor Gonzáles, Member Leader of Make the Road Pennsylvania and resident of Reading

“Durante años he luchado para poner fin al encarcelamiento de inmigrantes en mi patio trasero y hoy celebramos la libertad. Esta victoria pertenece a las familias inmigrantes y mujeres detenidas en Berks que compartieron sus historias y exigieron dignidad, y a los organizadores que nunca perdieron la esperanza y nunca dejaron de luchar para que las familias inmigrantes sean libres y unidas. Llevamos esta lucha desde el condado de Berks hasta Harrisburg y hasta la Casa Blanca, y me enorgullece decir que organizarse en comunidad funciona. Hoy es un buen día.”

Flor Gonzáles, miembro líder de Make the Road Pennsylvania y residente de Reading