

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Victory for Immigrant Community: Berks County Detention Center Closing

*Those formerly detained at Berks & community leaders speak out after receiving news of
the closure of the immigrant prison*

Pennsylvania - On November 30th, 2022 it was announced that the Biden Administration will be ending the ICE Contract with Berks County on January 31st, 2023. Since 2015, when the sexual assault of a mother at Berks by a staff member sparked outrage among community members, the Shut Down Berks Coalition has been demanding the permanent closure of the prison. We celebrate this victory but remain steadfast in once again demanding the immediate release of women from this prison; we will not accept the transfer of people currently detained at Berks to other immigrant prisons.

WHAT: *Press briefing with a woman previously detained at Berks*

WHEN: *December 1, 2022 at 5:30pm ET, 4:30pm CT, 2:30pm PT*

WHERE: <https://paimmigrant.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZIpdeCvrjkiHtBfevSO3PeOktlogSY7ZSEm>

WHO: *Shut Down Berks Coalition*

This is a victory for the immigrant community in Berks and beyond. We want to thank and honor the many women 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. *“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.”* said Mr. H, father detained with 6 year-old daughter for 7 months.

We are beyond thrilled that this cycle of violence will be coming to an end, and we look forward to seeing everyone released to their families and communities. We will remain vigilant that this site will never again be used to inflict more violence against immigrants or incarcerate more people as it transitions to a new purpose.

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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.” / “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.”

said Mr. H, father detained with 6 year old for 7 months
dijo el 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.” / “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”.

said Mr. A, father incarcerated with son for 1 month
dijo el 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,” / “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”.

said CASA member, Liliana Perez. [Link to picture of Lilian and her children](#)
dijo 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” / “Gracias a Dios hoy si la victoria es completa para nosotras y gracias a nuestras abogadas que lucharon hasta el final”

said J, a mother formerly detained with her teenage child at Berks for over 1 year
Dijo 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.” / “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.”

said Lorena, mother incarcerated with her son for nearly 2 years
dijo 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.” / “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.”

said Cristina, a mother formerly detained with her son at the Berks prison.
dijo Cristina, una madre anteriormente detenida con su hijo en la prisión de Berks.

“Thank God. I am so happy about everything.”/ “Gracias a Dios. Estoy tan feliz por todo.”

said Karen, mother detained with her son for nearly 2 years
dijo 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.” / “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, Member Leader of Make the Road Pennsylvania and resident of Reading
Flor Gonzáles, miembro líder de Make the Road Pennsylvania y residente de Reading

Quotes from Organization Leaders

“The closure of the Berks Detention Center is a hard fought victory delivered by a coalition of fearless organizers and incarcerated parents and families who never stopped fighting for freedom. Immigration detention centers are notorious for abuse, medical neglect, and complete disregard for dignity. People navigating their immigration cases should be able to do so with their families and loved ones, not behind bars in immigration detention. Thanks to eight years of organizing under Republican and Democratic administrations, through horrifying abuses and temporary closures, today we are celebrating an enormous win for our communities. Our fight will continue tomorrow to ensure these individuals are reunited with their loved ones and not placed in harm’s way at the hands of ICE.”

said Armando Jiménez, Senior Lead Organizer of Make the Road Pennsylvania, on behalf of the organization's thousands of members.

“This victory shows that when we fight together to demand freedom, nothing is impossible. For decades, the U.S. government has sent people seeking safety--including toddlers and infants--to the ICE prison in Berks County. The government's decision to close the prison is the result of years of organizing led by community members impacted by ICE raids and jails, including parents who were incarcerated at Berks with their children.”

said David Bennion, Executive Director, Free Migration Project

“Closing the Detention Center here in Berks County finally puts an end to the years of trauma inflicted against immigrants in our communities. It couldn't have happened without the direct action and leadership of those held there and in other centers around America. Now we must ensure that anyone held is released to their family and it falls to us in Berks to ensure the center is transformed into a true public service that meets our community needs.”

said Celine Schrier, local Organizer for Berks Stands Up

“We celebrate this news with our community leaders as validation of the power of organizing and persistence. We look forward to building on this momentum to reach our next goal of ending all immigrant detention in PA.”

said Andy Kang, Executive Director of PICC

“This is a collective victory against securitization and vilification of our communities. It is now time for Berks county to utilize this building for the collective benefit of all county residents, including refugees, immigrants and asylees.”

said Ahmet Tekelioglu Executive Director of CAIR Philadelphia

“This victory is the embodiment of the resilience, bravery and courage of our immigrant brothers and sisters who suffered the consequences of detention for too long. They taught the rest of us, the Coalition members and activists, how to persevere and stay hopeful. Today, we are celebrating this victory with them. Tomorrow, we will continue our fight, until we see every woman free. The facility must be transformed to a community center because we need services and resources for our communities to thrive, no more immigrant prisons.”

said Nune Grigoryan (She/her), PhD, Interim Director of the Center on Immigration

“DHS has tried for decades to detain children, families and women at the Berks detention center. Every iteration of the jail has faced a backlash from a very strong and dedicated legal and organizing effort to end detention and to protect children and families. After setting up a model pro bono and universal legal services program, that has represented thousands of people detained there, with the goal to win all the cases, in standing alongside those harmed by detention and those organizing passionately against its evils, the government may have, just finally, made the right decision to end immigration detention in Berks County. I'm happy to say that Aldea played a role in helping detained women, families and children

defeat a detention and deportation machine for more than 8 years and will continue to do so unless and until its doors are actually closed."

said Adriana Zambrano, Programs Coordinator for Aldea, the people's justice center