

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

June 20, 2018

The Honorable Jeff Sessions  
Attorney General  
Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20530

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
3801 Nebraska Ave, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Attorney General Sessions and Secretary Nielsen,

We write to you about the inhumane and un-American treatment of asylum seekers detained in federal prisons across the United States, and ask that you immediately reverse the Zero Tolerance Policy.

On Saturday, June 16, 2018, we met with many of the 123 asylum seekers being held indefinitely at the Federal Correctional Institution, Sheridan (FCI Sheridan) in Oregon. Conversations with these men fleeing persecution and terror in their home countries left us extremely concerned about their treatment here and the conditions surrounding their detention.

We were told that none of the asylum seekers had spoken with legal counsel about their asylum claims. Some of these detainees indicated they had no access to an interpreter until we arrived despite the fact detainees represent 16 countries and speak 13 languages. We also heard directly from detainees about their lack of access to medical care. As one example of this troubling fact, a man with bullet wounds had not been treated since arriving at the border weeks ago. Detainees are being held in a higher security facility than convicted criminals and held 22-23 hours in their cells. Further, several men stated they were separated from their wives and children and did not know where their loved ones were or how to reach them, including one man who was separated from his 18 month-old daughter.

The situation at FCI Sheridan is unacceptable and flies in the face of humanitarian values we hold dear in Oregon and across the United States. These asylum seekers are fleeing religious and political persecution, yet they are being held in federal prisons without access to attorneys, translators, phones or adequate medical care.

It is clear to us these asylum seekers have constitutional and basic human rights that are not being honored. We ask that you immediately work with the U.S. Bureau of Prisons (BOP), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and immigration lawyers to follow the law and provide these constitutional rights. Specifically, we ask you to coordinate with local BOP and ICE officials to do the following:

1. provide immediate access to legal counsel, including free, confidential calls to attorneys;

2. provide interpreters for every language spoken by these asylum seekers;
3. cease deportations or official interviews until legal visitations occur;
4. commit to hear all cases of individuals detained at FCI Sheridan at the Portland Immigration Court;
5. provide nutritious meal options that respect the religious requirements of the detainees;
6. ensure that detainees are given the same amount of time outside of cells as those who are being held in the minimum security prison, which may require restructuring of how asylum seekers are housed at the facility;
7. allow clergy members into the Federal Detention Center so asylum seekers may receive religious support;
8. ensure that every person gets access to quality medical care to address all medical issues that occurred while detained and prior to being detained;
9. ensure that every detainee who has been separated from family members is given information on where their family members are being held and how to communicate with them; and
10. detail the processes in place to ensure that separated children are reunited with their family members after their cases have been resolved.

We request a detailed outline of how the Administration plans to address these urgent needs. The Administration's inhumane Zero Tolerance Policy created this abhorrent situation, and it is imperative that you provide the necessary resources to both BOP and ICE to address the needs of the asylum seekers detained in Sheridan and federal correctional institutions nationwide.

Finally and fundamentally, we ask that you immediately reverse the "zero tolerance" policy and immediately terminate the practice of separating children from their parents. This policy has clearly caused additional trauma to asylum seekers as well as their children and spouses fearing persecution in their home countries.

We ask that you immediately respond. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress



Kurt Schrader  
Member of Congress