

Questions of Immigration and Community Impact

Immigration politics have been prevalent in the news cycle of Americans in the last decade. Questions of how refugees and undocumented immigrants should be treated are frequently aired, especially in political conversations. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is one of the main organizations that oversee immigration, and they specifically oversee three detention centers designed to hold migrant parents and children in deportation proceedings.

ICE has come under fire numerous times for various policies, such as using solitary confinement for mentally ill immigrants and impositions against LGBTQ immigrants. Family detention has been an especially contentious aspect of debates surrounding immigration. There are two Texas facilities operated by for-profit prison companies and a smaller one run by officials in Berks County, Pennsylvania. Collectively, the facilities have beds for more than 3,300 parents and children.

Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), an organization under the Department of Homeland Security, holds immigrant family members after an initial arrest. They should only host families for up to 72 hours before being transferred to an ICE family detention center, but due to delays in processing, families can be left in CBP sites for weeks. The Berks County Residential Center in Pennsylvania opened in 2011. Reports of inhumane treatment and sexual abuse led to the Pennsylvania Auditor General opening an investigation in 2019 of human rights abuses in the facility.

Most recently in February of 2021, Berks County Residential Center released seven families. The 25 immigrants are to live with sponsors, though they have not been converted to COVID-19 reception facilities to aid in the process of testing and housing COVID patients. It is currently unclear why families were released from the Berks County facility, but advocates for the removal of family detention centers are hopeful that releasing the families successfully will yield fruitful conversations about permanent policy change.

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