

Delivered via e-mail

July 15, 2019

Mayor Victoria Woodards
Councilmembers
City of Tacoma
Tacoma Municipal Building
747 Market St., Suite 1200
Tacoma, WA 98402

RE: Regarding recent events at the Northwest Detention Center

Dear Mayor Woodards and City Council Members,

Tacoma's Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs includes community members who walk the same streets as you, breathe the same air, and in many instances, carry the same hopes for a just and inclusive society.

This past weekend's police-involved shooting and loss of life at the Northwest Detention Center rip at those hopes, and we can no longer be silent on the issue. From day one, this Commission has identified immigration detention as one of our top priority issues, yet we have struggled to convert numerous meetings with public officials into urgent, clear, and effective solutions. This shooting on Saturday reveals that immigration detention and the facility itself are flashpoints that threaten more than just the immigrant and refugee populations. The facility's very presence endangers the lives of workers at the facility, law enforcement officers, community members, and, of course, the detainees who suffer every minute of every day within its walls. This has become a grave community safety risk, in the widest sense.

Our country has a long dark history of mistreating human beings. The cost of that violence to our communities cannot be adequately measured, yet that cost is only a line item for many businesses that engage in human displacement, internment, incarceration, detention. No more. Inhumane and unjust detention practices threaten the very foundations of entire communities and their vital link to civic life – these are existential threats, so we believe detention-related activities should carry similar costs to businesses engaged in that dehumanization.

Often, we hear that the location of the NW Detention Center in Tacoma at least provides some support services for detainees, but that is a half-hearted argument that weakens every day. Ultimately, less detention is always better. We must also realize our local actions can inspire nationally, because we are not alone in this fight. Places like Goshen, Indiana, and Dwight, Illinois, have been in the news because they are communities that rejected new detention facilities. This Commission stood before City Council several months ago and spoke about the cost of being on the "wrong side of history" in our treatment of immigrants and refugees. By

the same token, we have an immense opportunity to do better, and we must seize it. Delays are not neutral; each moment of inaction draws new profit from detainees' suffering.

This Commission commits to identifying as soon as possible specific advisory recommendations to reduce the practice of immigration detention in Tacoma. Any forthcoming recommendations from this Commission will aim to advance these general strategies:

- Increase the expense of detaining human beings while reducing the public expense to City structures, taxpayers, and community partners
- Materially improve the health conditions and well-being of any individuals detained at the Northwest Detention Center
- Provide clear and accessible pathways for detainees and their representatives to comment on their treatment during detention, with public documentation of such comments
- Explore possible collaborations at the local, county, regional, and even federal levels to match the expansive scope of this issue and leverage shared resources

We strongly urge you to consider concrete ideas that align with our general strategies at the earliest opportunity to begin reducing the presence of immigration detention in Tacoma. This Commission will be doing the same.

Signed on behalf of the Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs,



Jefferson Mok, Chair



Diana Parra, Vice Chair