

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 26, 2020

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

We write to seek immediate review of the conditions at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facilities in Farmville, Virginia and Bowling Green, Virginia. It is our understanding that despite the ongoing 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, ICE is continuing its practice of interstate detainee transfer among facilities. Not unsurprisingly, as a result of such transfers, the facility in Farmville, Virginia recently took in detainees and then found a spike in positive cases of COVID-19 at the facility. The health and well-being of detainees and the workers should be the priority of ICE. We urge ICE to immediately halt transferring individuals in ICE custody, and in the case of the two facilities in the Commonwealth, work quickly with the Virginia Department of Health to increase testing at each facility.

In early June, ICE transferred over 70 detainees from Arizona and Florida to the Immigration Centers of America Farmville (Farmville ICA) detention facility. While Farmville ICA appears to have followed appropriate quarantine measures, it seems the decision to transfer detainees between facilities has instead resulted in over 50 positive COVID-19 cases at Farmville ICA. Additionally, at least two staff members at Farmville ICA have tested positive for COVID-19. The situation in Virginia highlights the inherent danger of such interstate transfers at this time. We believe further transfers between local, state, and federal jails and detention centers would risk accelerating COVID-19 cases in facilities nationwide, along with putting surrounding communities at heightened risk and must be ceased at this time.

Further, it is important that there be more widespread testing at the facilities in the Commonwealth now to stop any further spread of the virus. Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, in a May 14, 2020, letter to the Virginia Congressional Delegation offered to provide testing support to the federally-controlled ICE detention facilities in both Farmville and Bowling Green. We encourage ICE to take the offer from the Governor and allow the State Health Commissioner and the Virginia Department of Health access to these facilities. Increased screening and testing within these detention centers will undoubtedly help curb the outbreaks that have resulted from transfers.

Until ICE discontinues the practice of transfers and expands testing accessibility and resources, ICE will only continue to exacerbate conditions for individuals in its custody as well as staff members. We appreciate your attention to these issues, and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator

