

Joint Statement by the detained people at Mesa Verde

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, those of us detained inside the Mesa Verde ICE detention facility have been sounding the alarm about the spread of the virus and the mortal danger we all faced. Despite being locked up and given very few resources, we have banded together and organized. We've written letters to ICE, GEO Group, and state officials; staged sit-ins in the yard, gone on hunger strike four times, and most recently, held a week long work stoppage - all to highlight the disaster we all saw coming. That disaster is now our reality.

COVID-19 has arrived at Mesa Verde and is spreading like wildfire. In the past two weeks, at least 9 people have been diagnosed with COVID-19, and two of our brothers have been hospitalized. ICE left one -- an elderly, disabled man who speaks very little English -- at an ER, and refused to tell his family or his attorneys where he was for almost an entire day. The other was brought back to Mesa Verde still gravely ill, and left in a solitary confinement cell for hours without any medical care. Dozens of people in our dorms are showing symptoms of COVID-19, and are desperate for care. It takes days to see a doctor, and even then, they often just give us Tylenol and send us back to our dorms. We had to fight hard to get tested for COVID-19, and most of us still do not know our status. ICE and GEO recently admitted in court that they delayed testing us to avoid "housing issues," or in other words, because they simply do not have anywhere to put sick people. Mesa Verde only has a few quarantine cells, and most of us have been shuffled around between dorms over the past few days.

These past few months have made clear that the people keeping us caged - ICE, GEO Group, and even California state officials - do not care if we live or die. They do not care about our humanity; to them, we are numbers and dollar signs. In addition, they are not equipped for this crisis. Despite our countless warnings, they did not have a plan in place for this inevitable catastrophe, and they are not doing nearly enough to prevent grave illness and death here at Mesa Verde.

The current outbreak of COVID-19 in Mesa Verde is the direct result of policy choices by the Governor Gavin Newsom and California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), to continue to transfer people from state prisons into ICE detention, despite public health warnings against such transfers. As recently as last week, new people continued to arrive in our dorms, straight from prisons with massive COVID-19 outbreaks, without being quarantined or even tested for the virus.

This outbreak is also the result of horrific negligence by the for-profit GEO group, which refuses to follow even the most basic standards of care. Even before the pandemic, GEO group kept us in unsanitary housing, fed us rotten and non-nutritious food, and provided little to no medical care. These conditions have only worsened. In response to us speaking out, GEO group has retaliated by refusing to clean our dorms (leaving them dirty and disgusting), taking away our commissary accounts (which we use to buy soap and other personal hygiene supplies, and to call our families), and limiting access to tablets (which we use to communicate with Mesa Verde officials and request doctors' appointments). GEO is also violating mandatory standards around transfers into the

facility, ignoring protocols for the intake, screening and evaluation of people being transferred from state prisons. We remain at the mercy of a for-profit corporation who cares only about its profits and not our safety or well being.

Lastly we remain separated from our families, trapped inside this horrific cage, and constantly dehumanized and vilified by ICE, who has spent more time and energy attempting to undermine our organized resistance and advocacy than exercising even an ounce of compassion towards any of us.

We have been warning the world about the impending disaster here at Mesa Verde, and we have been completely ignored by judges, governmental agencies, and politicians who continue to deny their responsibility for our situation and their power to save our lives.

Despite all of this, we remain united, and committed to supporting one another and surviving against all odds in this facility. Our words and actions matter. We matter. We will not go quietly. We stand united with our communities, our families, and our comrades in cages throughout the world.