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We, the undersigned legal service providers, immigration advocacy organizations, and individual pro bono lawyers working together advocating for the women jailed at GEO's Karnes Family Detention Center ("Karnes"), **write to express our outrage at retaliation against pro bono legal staff and inmates.**

Since last August, Karnes has held mothers and young children who are seeking asylum in the United States. No lawyers are provided to them, and almost no lawyers are available to represent them save the pro bono representation provided by the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES) and its handful of partner attorneys.

In the past two weeks, two legal assistants have been banned from Karnes for speaking out about what they have seen there and helping inmates to do the same.

- On March 19th, the pro bono lawyer Virginia Raymond was informed that her legal assistant, Victoria Elsa Rossi, no longer had permission to enter the Karnes facility as a paralegal. ICE did not provide any written reason for this exclusion; orally, however Supervisory Detention and Deportation Officer (SDDO) Hilario Leal told Raymond that Rossi had entered Karnes as a "paralegal" although ICE had only authorized her to visit as an "interpreter." This decision followed closely with Victoria having just published an article in the *Texas Observer* describing the conditions at Karnes.
- On March 30th, RAICES was informed that Johana De Leon, a staff legal assistant, has been suspended from entering the Karnes facility. RAICES was told by ICE that this action was taken as a result of the organization's support to the mothers at Karnes who are fasting for Holy Week, in protest of their indefinite detention. Further, ICE stated concern with Ms. De Leon's communications with media agencies as to the plight of the families.

Worse, the inmate organizers of the fast are being punished with solitary confinement. One mother, Polyane Soares de Oliveira dos Santos (A#200-022-852) was threatened with separation from her ten-year old daughter, should she continue to protest.

Retaliation is unjust and unfair. It further deprives jailed mothers and children of the precious legal help they have, and of their Constitutional right to protest the conditions of their confinement.

We, the undersigned, ask for an immediate reversal of these retaliatory bans against pro bono legal staff, and assurance that women who decide to exercise their free speech are able to do so without fear of retribution.

Sincerely,

- Virginia Raymond – Austin, Texas
- Jonathan Ryan, Executive Director, Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES)
- Southern Poverty Law Center
- Rachel B. Tiven, Executive Director, Immigrant Justice Corps
- Rachel Gore Freed, J.D., Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
- Roxana Bacon, Former Chief Counsel, USCIS
- Mark Silverman, Director of Immigration Policy, Immigrant Legal Resource Center
- Charles Kuck, Managing Partner, Kuck Immigration Partners LLC
- John Patrick Pratt, Esq., Kurzban, Kurzban, Weinger, Tetzeli, & Pratt P.A
- Pangea Legal Services, San Francisco, CA
- Chris Newman, Legal Director, National Day Laborer Organizing Network
- Prerna Lal, Staff Attorney, Asian Americans Advancing Justice—AAJC
- Detention Watch Network
- Law Office of Gaye Ozpinar, Cambridge, MA
- Families For Freedom, NY
- Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center
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- John Willshire-Carrera, co-managing director of Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic at Greater Boston Legal Services
- Nancy Kelly is the co-managing director of Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic at Greater Boston Legal Services

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