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August 25, 2023

The Honorable Merrick Garland
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Attorney General Garland,

As members of Congress, we write to express our concern regarding the United States Department of Justice's (DOJ) statement of interest in *CoreCivic vs Philip D. Murphy Governor of New Jersey* (Case No. 3:23-CV-00967-RK-TJB), CoreCivic's lawsuit against the state of New Jersey regarding state law AB 5207, which prohibits state and local entities and private detention facilities from entering into agreements to detain noncitizens. We ask the Biden administration and the DOJ to respect the democratically passed and signed laws and side with constituents over private interests.

On August 20, 2021, AB 5207 was enacted into law by Governor Murphy with the goal of ending the use of private immigration detention facilities within the state. This legislation answered the call of local communities, concerned citizens, and advocacy groups that promote the interests of New Jerseyans over for-profit prison companies to permanently close the Elizabeth Detention Center (EDC), a facility with a history of poor sanitation, crumbling infrastructure, and complaints of physical and verbal abuse.

CoreCivic, in contract with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), has held hundreds of immigrants in poor conditions at EDC despite sustained protests and legal battles calling for a range of interventions, including improved conditions, closure of the facility, and freedom for detainees. Based on reports from detained individuals and legal advocates, inhumane conditions at EDC include a lack of proper air quality, sanitation violations, overcrowding, inadequate medical and mental health care, and incidents of retaliation and abusive treatment by guards and staff. Despite extensive complaints, lawsuits, protests, and calls for action, ICE and CoreCivic are seeking to renew their contract for the sixth time and extend operations at the EDC after the expiration of their current contract on August 31, 2023.

The enactment of AB 5207 aligns with President Biden’s stated vow to end the federal government’s use of privately operated criminal detention facilities, which underscores our concern for the Administration’s support for CoreCivic’s lawsuit. We are troubled that the DOJ’s intervention could undermine that effort by continuing to take part in this lawsuit. CoreCivic’s quest to continue operating EDC in violation of AB 5207 undermines our state’s democratic process and is counter to the wishes of the community in Elizabeth, local congressional districts, and the state. It must not be met with support from the federal government.

We respectfully request that the DOJ rescind its statement of interest in the CoreCivic Lawsuit and stand with the citizens of New Jersey.

We thank you for your leadership and look forward to working with you to protect the interests of the public.

Sincerely,



Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress



Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress



Robert J. Menendez
Member of Congress



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress



Andy Kim
Member of Congress



Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress