



DIOCESE OF CHEYENNE

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Catholic Church Opposes For-Profit Immigrant Detention Center

November 18, 2019

Recently, Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) doubled the upper limit for an immigration detention center proposed to be built near Evanston. It was reported that the maximum number of beds jumped from 500 to 1,000. Some believe that this change may be due to several state and local governments cutting ties with private for-profit detention facilities or state legislatures passing bills to deter immigrant detention in Virginia, Texas, Michigan, Illinois and California.

No matter the reason for the increase in beds, it seems prudent for Wyoming's local and state officials to become better informed about purported business practices of for-profit detention centers, which often prey upon vulnerable communities where jobs are needed. Various sources claim that these institutions are understaffed, offer limited training and poor benefits to their employees, and often cut corners on nutrition and medical care for those persons who are being held. Many immigrants are placed in immigration detention centers in states where they are unable to access legal assistance, communicate with their families and receive any meaningful support. Certainly, appropriate legal representation is not readily available in Evanston.

The Catholic Church has a long history of supporting the dignity and rights of all human persons, and it is gravely concerned about the practice of long-term and large-scale detention of undocumented adult immigrants and their families. The Catholic Church also is troubled by any institution that seeks to capitalize on human suffering, and it views immigrant detention centers from the perspective of our biblical tradition, which calls us to act with justice toward persons on the margins of society, including strangers and imprisoned persons.

Jesus Christ commanded us to imitate his love; thus, he calls us to protect the rights of refugees, to promote the reunification of families and to honor the inherent dignity of all migrants, whatever their status. Regrettably, the U.S. immigrant detention system represents a far cry from loving solidarity. It divides us from our migrant brothers and sisters and separates families, and it allows for a system in which for-profit prison companies and their stock holders and business partners make a great deal of money on the misery of human persons.

This is not to say that the Catholic Church does not accept the legitimate role of the U.S. government to ensure public safety and to detain those individuals who are a threat to our communities. Current immigrant detention policies, however, are costly, inhumane and destructive to families. The Catholic Church, therefore, supports comprehensive immigration reform, including earned legalization; a future worker program; family-based immigration reform; restoration of due process rights; and, possibly most important, addressing root causes of migration.

The Catholic Church promotes faithful citizenship and urges all people of good will to contribute to civil and respectful public dialogue. Everyone has a duty to weigh in on civic issues so as to promote the common good; it is a concrete way of loving our neighbor.

Wyoming's contribution to the immigration problem should not be to remain silent. Issues surrounding immigration today demand everyone's attention and civic participation. This is especially true for elected officials, but all people have a responsibility to speak out. For-profit prisons are only one symptom of a larger issue that must be addressed by the federal government. Often action at the federal level is driven when citizens at the local level raise their voices.

The Diocese of Cheyenne stands in opposition to the proposed immigration for-profit detention center in Uinta County because when people profit from the suffering of others, their will to relieve that suffering is diminished.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steven Biegler". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Steven Biegler

Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Cheyenne