

## AN OPEN LETTER ON FAMILY DETENTION IN PENNSYLVANIA:

Founded on the basis of tolerance, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania espouses the motto of “Virtue, Liberty, and Independence”. It is therefore deeply concerning that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is complicit in a federal policy of intolerance and is eschewing its own values of liberty.

Since 2001, Pennsylvania has been home to the Berks County Residential Center (BCRC), one of only three centers in the United States that detains migrant families. Currently, parents and their children who come into the United States seeking asylum can be held indefinitely at BCRC – children as young as 2-years-old have been held in detention there for more than a year. This practice violates Pennsylvania state and federal law, which clearly states that jailing children who are not facing criminal charges is unlawful. In addition to the detention, documented instances of abuse and neglect by the staff and administration further endanger the physical and mental health of children and their families.

Each day BCRC is allowed to operate, Pennsylvania is complicit in the morally unacceptable and traumatic act of jailing children and their parents. Each day BCRC is allowed to operate, Pennsylvania legitimizes the anti-immigrant discourse plaguing our nation.

We urge Governor Wolf and the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services to take action to close BCRC immediately to ensure that the civil liberties, health and welfare of migrant children and their families are addressed.

Closing BCRC would help in encouraging immigration officials to release immigrant families to relatives or sponsors in the United States while they await their immigration status hearings.

We as a community of grantmakers in Pennsylvania - whose work collectively centers on compassion and responsiveness to our most vulnerable - call upon Governor Wolf and the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services to close BCRC. Doing so would make a powerful statement that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania stands for the value of tolerance on which it was founded.