



**CITY OF SAN DIEGO
COUNCIL PRESIDENT GEORGETTE GÓMEZ**

April 23, 2020

Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Request for immediate reduction of people at the Otay Mesa Detention Center during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Governor Newsom,

I write to you in regards to my concern with the rapid increase of COVID-19 cases at the Otay Mesa Detention Center in San Diego. Social distancing is not an option in a detention center as people share toilets, showers, and cells. With everything we've learned from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we know these conditions are dangerous, even deadly.

On Monday, April 20, 2020, KPBS San Diego published an article which included the latest number of COVID-19 infections at the Otay Mesa Detention Center. The report highlighted the latest statistics publicly released by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), showing that 18 ICE detainees and 8 ICE employees tested positive for COVID-19.¹ Given the confirmed COVID-19 cases among both staff and detainees, it is critical for detention center operators to take immediate action to reduce the number of detainees at this detention center.

The State of California must take a stance and denounce the unsafe conditions for those detained at the Otay Mesa Detention Center. I request your leadership in holding CoreCivic and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) accountable by making the actions below:

¹ PBS, *Immigrant Org Petitions Court For Release Of Four Otay Mesa Detainees* (Apr. 20, 2020) available at https://www.kpbs.org/news/2020/apr/20/immigrant-org-petitions-court-for-release-of-four/?utm_campaign=none&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_term=headline/?_zl=msT42&_zs=SawuX

1. Request DHS adequately depopulate the Otay Mesa Detention Center.
2. Those who have tested positive for COVID-19 should be allowed to leave facility and receive proper medical care.
3. Individuals who have medical conditions or are members of a vulnerable population susceptible to COVID-19 should be released immediately.
4. Request DHS investigate the complaints by inmates regarding the neglect by CoreCivic employees to follow CDC guidelines and provide proper PPE to detainees.
5. Call on DHS to consider alternatives to detention during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, in a letter addressed to the Department of Homeland Security sent on April 15, 2020, members of California's Congressional delegation urged DHS for an investigation to this facility's response to COVID-19.² You, through your authority to issue executive orders, have already demonstrated that you understand the need to provide aid to those incarcerated in the State's prison and juvenile facilities. It is imperative for you, as the Governor of the State of California, to add your voice to this concern for the livelihood of those who are detained at the Otay Mesa Detention facility.

People in detention are in desperate need of support as they are relegated to a confined space and outcasted from the rest of society, making them susceptible to contracting COVID-19 and nowhere to seek proper medical relief.

My office stands available with any further questions you might have, please do not hesitate to contact Gloria Cardenas at (619) 368-2437, gcardenas@sanidiego.gov.

Sincerely,



Georgette Gómez
Council President, City of San Diego

² April 15, 2020. Kamala D. Harris United States, Dianne Feinstein United States, Juan Vargas Member of Congress. <https://www.harris.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Sen.%20Harris%20Letter%20to%20OIG%20re%20Otay%20Mesa.pdf>