

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 9, 2019

Ronald D. Vitiello
Acting Director
U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th St., SW
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Acting Director Vitiello:

We write to request the immediate release of Ms. [REDACTED] M [REDACTED] B [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and her 15-year-old daughter, Cristy [REDACTED], from the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas, where they have been detained for more than six months. We are deeply concerned for their well-being, and particularly for Cristy, whose mental health continues to decline while in detention.

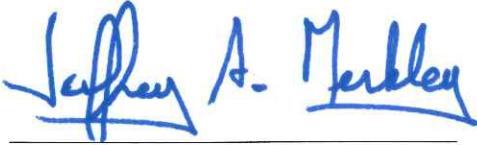
Ms. M [REDACTED] B [REDACTED] and her daughter traveled to the United States from Honduras in 2016 to seek asylum. We personally spoke with Ms. M [REDACTED] B [REDACTED] and learned about trauma she and her daughter have experienced and the immense strain their detention has imposed on them. After completing the credible fear process, both Ms. M [REDACTED] B [REDACTED] and her daughter were released with Notices to Appear and permitted to continue fighting their cases in a non-detained setting. Following her release Ms. M [REDACTED] B [REDACTED] found herself victim to severe domestic violence at the hands of a domestic partner in the United States. She reported her abuser to the police and fled her home. Ms. M [REDACTED] B [REDACTED] filed a U visa application based upon these facts, which is currently pending.

We have been informed that currently, Cristy is in removal proceedings before the Immigration Judge and Ms. M [REDACTED] B [REDACTED] is in the process of appealing the order of the Immigration Judge in her case to the Board of Immigration Appeals. Each process could take months, if not years, to conclude, subjecting this family to indefinite detention.

We understand that while in detention Cristy has experienced ongoing suicidal ideation, with at least one suicide attempt, and has expressed that she would rather be dead than detained any longer. This is deeply concerning, particularly given Cristy's life history - which includes at least two incidents of sexual assault. It is clear that Cristy needs the care of her mother and the presence of her mother is critical to Cristy's well-being and safety.

Based on these troubling circumstances, we believe that Cristy cannot effectively participate in her asylum proceeding without the presence of her mother, and is suffering from psychological harm due to her prolonged and indefinite detention in a secure, unlicensed facility. While we understand that ICE and Ms. M [REDACTED] B [REDACTED] maintain differing interpretations of the underlying facts in their asylum case, we believe the totality of these truly extraordinary circumstances weigh strongly in favor of releasing Cristy from detention to the care of her mother, and releasing her mother on an order of supervision.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Mazie Hirono
United States Senator



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Tina Smith
United States Senator