



First
Unitarian Universalist
Church of San Diego

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SOLACE visitation program statement on COVID-19 and Otay Mesa Detention Center

At the for-profit Otay Mesa Detention Center (OMDC) located in San Diego and operated by CoreCivic, hundreds of people are at risk of contracting the novel coronavirus. As the COVID-19 pandemic rages on, it is clear that we are in this together. We're only as healthy as the most vulnerable of our communities, including people in immigration detention. Public health leaders have [explained](#) that our collective well-being as a society depends on releasing as many people as possible from *all* forms of incarceration.

OMDC is the immigrant prison with the [highest number of reported COVID-19 cases](#) in the country. There are troubling reports, including a [recorded phone call](#), from individuals inside the facility that they are being required to sign a liability waiver in exchange for protective masks and being threatened with pepper spray if they refuse. [A number of people detained at OMDC are hunger striking](#) in protest of their continued incarceration, where they are inherently kept in close proximity to each other, unable to physically distance and do not have adequate access to hygiene items.

As a visitation group at OMDC, we know from our communications with people inside that access to soap, hand sanitizer and medical care is inadequate. We are extremely concerned that proper measures and precautions are not being taken to ensure the health and safety of detained people and facility staff against further transmission.

We are also part of a network that monitors and documents detention conditions across the country, and we know that the United State's immigration system [is putting the lives of hundreds of thousands of immigrants at risk every day](#). Many people are shocked to learn that the federal government needlessly detains tens of thousands of immigrants, locking them up in harsh and unsanitary detention conditions where they remain [unprotected](#). Their detention has always been cruel and unnecessary but at this moment, it is also endangering their lives. ICE must release immigrants now, especially those who are at high risk of serious illness, if infected.

In the interim, ICE and CoreCivic must ensure the safety and wellbeing of the entire community at OMDC by doing the following, at no cost to detained individuals:

- Provide hygiene supplies and protective masks
- Screen/test for COVID-19
- Off-site quarantine and treatment of people in ICE custody – quarantining of entire housing pod(s) at OMDC is insufficient to mitigate virus spread
- Ensure access to family and community support, including free phone calls

In the [words](#) of California Senator Kamala Harris, "The horrifying conditions at OMDC are unacceptable. Every day that officials continue to lock up low-risk and vulnerable people is another day that people in U.S. custody along with countless facility and court personnel, legal representatives, witnesses, and family members are put at risk of a preventable death from a deadly virus." **ICE must save lives and #ReleaseThemNow.**