

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3302

August 5, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave. SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

David Venturella
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th St. SW
Washington, DC 20536

Dear Secretary Mullin and Acting Director Venturella:

I write to express my serious concerns regarding reports that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) plan to establish an immigration detention facility in Winton, North Carolina by the end of this year.¹ This proposal would revive a failed private prison whose history raises serious concerns about its suitability for housing detained individuals and impose significant burdens on a rural community with limited public infrastructure and public safety resources.

Reporting indicates that your agencies plan to open the detention facility at the site of the now-shuttered Rivers Correctional Institution. This facility was owned and operated by The GEO Group under contract with the Federal Bureau of Prisons for more than two decades. During that time, the privately operated prison was the subject of repeated complaints regarding poor conditions, including inadequate staffing, abysmal healthcare, disgusting food, and fears for inmate safety.² The Bureau of Prisons ultimately declined to renew its contract. Reopening the facility under The GEO Group's ownership as an ICE detention center raises legitimate concerns that the same poor conditions could persist. I am especially concerned given your agencies' recent practices of detaining and mistreating legal residents and even U.S. citizens.

The operation of such a facility would place additional pressure on local law enforcement, emergency medical services, fire departments, healthcare providers, utilities, infrastructure, and other public services that already operate with limited personnel and constrained budgets. While detention facilities operate under federal authority, local governments are often called upon to respond to emergencies, criminal investigations, transportation incidents, and other unforeseen

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/23/us/winton-nc-ice-detention-center.html>

² https://cic.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cic/page_content/attachments/FINAL_CI%20Rivers%202019%20Report.pdf

events. Local taxpayers and utility customers should not have to subsidize infrastructure improvements or absorb increased costs because of a federal decision.

Local residents, community organizations, and public officials have voiced concerns about the impact the facility would have on their community.³ North Carolina Governor Josh Stein has also expressed opposition to reopening the site as an ICE detention facility.⁴ Their opposition reflects a broader concern shared by North Carolinians across the state that North Carolina should not become the latest testing ground for the Trump administration's efforts to expand immigration detention.

While The GEO Group and its shareholders stand to profit from this federal contract, our communities will bear the costs in strained public services and the consequences of expanding a detention system that has repeatedly failed to meet the basic standards of safety, accountability, and human dignity. That is a bad deal for North Carolina. I oppose the reopening of this prison as an immigration detention facility and urge your agencies to reconsider this decision. If this decision goes through, rest assured that my Congressional colleagues and I will conduct rigorous oversight of this facility.

Sincerely,



Deborah K. Ross
Member of Congress

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/23/us/winton-nc-ice-detention-center.html>

⁴ https://x.com/NC_Governor/status/2080734790374904297