

For Immediate Release

Contact: Maru Mora Villalpando, (206) 251 6658, maru@latinoadvocacy.org

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Fourteen Cuban Asylum-Seekers Refusing All Food and Water Since Sunday,
Launching Fifth Hunger Strike at NWDC this Year

"We Came Here Seeking Freedom, and They Have Imprisoned Us"

Tacoma, WA – Fourteen Cubans currently imprisoned at the Northwest Detention Center (NWDC) in Tacoma, Washington have refused all food and drink since Sunday morning. Their only demand is their freedom. The fourteen arrived in the US seeking asylum, and were apprehended at the border and transferred to the immigration prison, where some have been held for over 3 months. The hunger strikers, many of whom traveled for nearly a year to reach the US, have family members waiting to receive them in this country. They have been found by immigration authorities to have "credible fear" of being returned to Cuba, are waiting for ICE to parole them into the US and allow them to join their families. Instead, they are being held without any knowledge of how long their imprisonment will last, a state of affairs one hunger-striker described as "psychological torture." He stated, "We came here seeking freedom and they have imprisoned us."

This hunger strike marks the fifth time this year that people detained in the NWDC have protested their detention through starvation at the now-infamous facility. This newest strike marks the continuation of one of the most powerful offensives by immigrants against the largest immigration prison on the West Coast.

Supporters fear that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and GEO Group, the private prison corporation that owns the facility, will retaliate against this most recent group of hunger strikers. This past month, following a GEO guard's assault of an 18-year-old immigrant, GEO punished approximately 20 people who spoke up against the assault with solitary confinement. When those in solitary confinement went on hunger strike to protest these human rights abuses, ICE and GEO representatives threatened them with charges of "planning a riot," force feeding, and transfers. ICE transferred approximately 10 detainees from the NWDC to facilities across the United States as retaliation and repression for their whistleblowing.

Despite already having received threats of force-feeding, the 14 Cubans currently on hunger strike remain committed to their fast. Supporters are gathering outside the facility, many coming directly from a rally this morning at ICE's Seattle office, where community pressure successfully pushed ICE to keep their hands off another whistleblower, 18-year-old A.J., who had showed up for an ICE "check-in" fearing detention and deportation. Two years ago, A.J. filed a lawsuit against Customs and Border Protection (CBP) for a racial profiling incident that led to his detention by ICE, as a then 15-year-old, in the adult-only facility. "ICE and GEO are on the wrong side of history, and people detained are continuing to put their lives on the line to expose their abuses. We will continue to support the Cubans on hunger strike – and everyone else imprisoned at the NWDC – until they are free," noted Maru Mora Villalpando of NWDC Resistance.

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