



**BIDEN TO BREAK MORE PROMISES BY MAKING GEORGIA THE PRIVATE PRISON  
CAPITAL OF THE U.S. WITH GEO MEGA IMMIGRANT DETENTION CENTER**  
*Advocates: Notoriously Abusive Folkston Facility Must Be Closed, Not Expanded*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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FOLKSTON, GA – Georgia immigrant rights advocates are urging the Biden administration to cease all negotiations and plans to expand the Folkston ICE Processing Center (FIPC) in South Georgia.

Members of the Folkston community and government workers have confirmed rumors that the GEO Group, a private prison corporation that operates the ICE detention facility in Folkston, is engaged in preparations to increase the facility’s capacity by 1800 beds. Added to over 1100 beds already in use, such an expansion would make the FIPC the largest ICE detention facility in the country.

“Instead of abiding by their promises of ending the use of private prisons, the Biden Administration is [doubling down](#) and expanding their use. This is reprehensible,” said Azadeh Shahshahani, Legal & Advocacy Director at Project South. “Private prison companies have a perverse incentive to maximize profit through shortchanging immigrants on basic necessities and forced labor programs. The Folkston ICE Processing Center must be shut down, not expanded.”

The state of Georgia has already become a flash point for human rights abuses perpetrated by ICE on a nationwide scale, from the [horrific number of deaths](#) at Stewart to the [widespread medical abuse](#) and nonconsensual gynecological procedures exposed at the Irwin County Detention Center (ICDC). Increasing immigration detention capacity in Georgia on the heels of ICE [ending its contract](#) with ICDC would break the promises that President Biden made in July 2019 when he said that he would end private detention.

“They need to shut this place down,” said Danny Lewis, a Jamaican man who was transferred to FIPC after Irwin County was forced to stop incarcerating people on behalf of ICE. “You can be dying in here, and there's no help. Folkston is worse than Irwin.”

Expanding FIPC would also directly conflict with Secretary [Mayorkas' commitments](#) to review detention centers for abuses. Immigration detention facilities run by the GEO Group have been exposed for having [deplorable conditions](#). In April 2020, the FIPC was the subject of [a lawsuit](#) filed by medically vulnerable individuals detained at the facility during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. These individuals identified deeply concerning human rights abuses, including medical neglect and inhumane living spaces. The [abysmal reality](#) of detention in Folkston has been evidenced by issues of access to counsel, poor sanitation regarding pests and plumbing, confinement to rooms for 22 hours a day, and medical inattention that has endangered the health of people detained at the facility.

Advocates say that rewarding the GEO Group with a lucrative contract after a federal court [found it liable](#) for exploiting immigrants detained at a detention facility in Washington State is a shortsighted and disastrous decision.

“After all the suffering we have endured in Georgia with ICDC, and continue to endure at Stewart and FIPC, immigrant incarceration is expanding. We still have open wounds,” said [Nilson Barahona](#), Founder of ICE Breakers, who was held in ICE detention in Georgia for 13 months before finally being released. “These expansion plans ignore the reports of abuse, inhumane conditions, and the President’s own words saying that private prisons ‘[should not exist](#).’ Not only do private prisons continue to operate, but they are expanding these concentration camps. This is a shame the community will not allow.”

[South Georgia immigrants' rights organizers](#) vehemently oppose the planned expansion of the FIPC. “The expansion of this detention camp will bring more suffering, fear, and disadvantage to the immigrant communities that are already struggling to survive around this area,” said Daniela Rodriguez, Director of Migrant Equity Southeast. “Very recently, South Georgia made [national news](#) when a modern-day slavery ring was busted, in which farm workers were raped, kidnapped and imprisoned. The Biden Administration should be paying reparations, instead of bringing more fear to South Georgia. We strongly condemn the expansion of this facility.”

“Enough with expanding these torturous concentration camps and making empty promises,” said Li Ann “Estrella” Sanchez, Founder of Community Estrella. “After we [interrupted](#) the

President in Georgia, he agreed that these prisons should not exist. We need investments in our communities, not cages where our human rights are violated.”

Sanchez explained, “I know [firsthand](#) what it’s like to suffer in three immigrant prisons in Georgia for the 13 months I was in ICE custody. ICE and private corporations like GEO Group have demonstrated their disregard for human life. ICE has our blood on their hands.”

The FIPC is currently under investigation by the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of the Inspector General for conditions that violate the rights of those detained there. Advocates say plans to expand the FIPC while it is under investigation are a slap in the face of any oversight attempts.

“Real safety does not come from incarceration, but instead through providing people with their basic needs,” said Lovette Thompson, the Atlanta Organizer with the Black Alliance for Just Immigration. “Conditions at immigration detention centers are often atrocious, but Black immigrants are [specifically targeted](#) because of anti-Blackness. No one should have to experience racism, human rights violations or cruelty in this country when seeking safety and a better life. It’s time to halt all detention expansion and shut them all down.”

“ICE prisons are inhumane and tear immigrant families and communities apart,” said Phi Nguyen, Executive Director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta. “We call on this Administration to invest in systems that center care, life, and dignity, instead of continuing to expand a system that functions to dehumanize and criminalize immigrants.”

Under an intergovernmental service agreement between Charlton County and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE began detaining immigrants at the facility in Folkston in 2017. The private prison, which originally opened as a state correctional facility in 1998, has contributed to [local economic decline](#) while devastating the lives of incarcerated people and their families.

“Rather than improving the local economy and increasing standards of living, more than 20 years of private prison administration in the area have not delivered the economic investment the local community critically needs. Charlton County is now the [fourth poorest county in Georgia](#) and the eleventh poorest in the country, despite having poverty levels close to the state median back in 1990,” said attorney Meredyth Yoon, speaking on behalf of a team of Folkston-based advocates who represent immigrants detained at FIPC. “The Biden administration must cease the expansion of the predatory private prison economy [that exists to serve corporations’ bottom lines](#) and instead [prioritize the lives](#) of immigrants and rural communities.”

“Let’s be clear: profiteering will exist as long as mass incarceration and deportation systems exist,” said Stacy Suh, Program Director of Detention Watch Network. “Ultimately, all ICE detention centers, whether publicly or privately operated, are fundamentally inhumane and driven by perverse financial incentives. The Biden administration must reverse course now on

his broken promises by shutting down private detention facilities and phasing out the use of detention all together.”

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Black Alliance for Just Immigration

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