

**MISSISSIPPI  
CENTER  
FOR JUSTICE**

**MISSISSIPPI ICE RAIDS ONE YEAR LATER:  
DEEPENING CRISIS AND WORSENING INJUSTICE  
A Report by the Mississippi Center for Justice**

**Summary**

Today, hundreds of immigrants and their families face deepening uncertainty and poverty one year after their lives were torn apart by ICE raids of poultry processing plants in central Mississippi. Some remain in detention where they face protracted judicial delays and exposure to COVID-19. Others who were released find little to no work, increased hunger and poverty, and extended delays of their cases. Yet, while over 680 workers and their families struggle to survive these conditions, only four mid-level managers from two companies have been indicted - not a single corporation or top-level executive faces a single charge. The U. S. Attorney announcing the four charges trotted out anti-immigration accusations, but this scapegoating does not hide his failure to punish these companies or their senior executives who exploited these vulnerable workers and reaped substantial private profit.<sup>1</sup>

These and other meat-packing facilities remain open by a White House emergency order, and are even seeking to operate faster,<sup>2</sup> despite being COVID-19 hot-spots due to long work hours in crowded conditions.<sup>3</sup> The rates of infection are high for these facilities generally, and for Hispanic/Latinx workers in particular, according to a study by the Centers for Disease Control.<sup>4</sup> Even though Mississippi has climbed to the top of recent per capita test positivity, case, and death statistics,<sup>5</sup> the state has not reported meat-processing plant COVID-19 infection data,<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Emily Wagster Pettus, *Four Poultry Plant Execs Indicted after 2019 Immigration Raid*, Jackson Free Press August 7, 2020 <https://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2020/aug/07/four-poultry-plant-execs-indicted-after-2019-immig/>

<sup>2</sup> David Pitt, *Unions Sue USDA over faster chicken plant production speeds. Mississippi plants included*. July 29, 2020, <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2020/07/29/unions-sue-usda-over-faster-chicken-plant-production-speeds/5534162002/>

<sup>3</sup> Bill Crawford, *Mississippi should safeguard meat-processing plant workers*, Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal, May 5, 2020, <https://www.newsbreak.com/news/1559869549796/bill-crawford-mississippi-should-safeguard-meat-processing-plant-workers>

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control, *Update: COVID-19 Among Workers in Meat and Poultry Processing Facilities — United States, April–May 2020*, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6927e2.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Today on a per capita basis, Mississippi is first in test positivity and deaths, and second in cases in the US for the past week. Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/testing/tracker/overview> (tests) New York Times Coronavirus in the US Latest Map and Case Count. [Link](#). (deaths and cases)

<sup>6</sup> Alissa Zhu, Giacomo Bologna, *'Profit over People': Chicken Plant workers are sick, but MS officials deny outbreaks*, May 1, 2020, <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2020/05/01/mississippi-coronavirus-disease-spreads-among-chicken-plant-workers/3041482001/>

although data from 23 other states show significant rates of infection and disproportionate effects upon Hispanic/Latinx workers.<sup>7</sup> This puts at risk the Mississippi workers and their family members still working at the poultry plants.

Mississippi is an unlikely priority for ICE enforcement action given that immigrants represent only two percent of the population, and according to local law enforcement, represent no danger and account for no rise in local crime. Mississippi also is an immigration law desert with a handful of lawyers and no courts in state to handle removal proceedings. Those detained from these raids were scattered across privately-run detention facilities in Mississippi and Louisiana. At present, an estimated 225 detainees have been removed due to prior immigration orders or other causes while 50 people remain detained. Another 105 people have been released on cash bonds or humanitarian release, joining the approximately 300 people released on the day of the raids. To achieve meaningful justice for these vulnerable and exploited people, federal officials must do the following:

- End the separation of parents from children
- Overhaul the unjust immigration removal system
- Defuse the COVID-19 “timebombs” in detention and work sites
- Prosecute the corporations who recruit and exploit immigrant labor

### **Discussion – Problems and Recommendations**

#### **End the separation of parents from children- “Please, can I just see my mother?”<sup>8</sup>**

Immediately following the raids, the world saw horrifying images from Mississippi—helicopters and militarized vehicles descending on small towns, armed officers rounding up hundreds of workers into buses, and children crying, unable to locate their parents. Calls began pouring into MCJ's offices from community members searching for loved ones.

Some children suffered weeks of separation without a parent at home.<sup>9</sup> A breastfeeding child's mother languished in detention away from her baby.<sup>10</sup> Over two hundred students in the raids-impacted areas missed classes during the days after the raids, terrified to leave home.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> 16,233 cases in 239 facilities were reported in 23 states. 61% of cases in 21 states where race/ethnicity was reported occurred among Hispanic/Latinx workers. *Update: COVID-19 Among Workers in Meat and Poultry Processing Facilities – United States, April-May 2020*. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6927e2.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Unidentified eleven-year-old girl quoted in Dianne Gallagher, et al., *680 Undocumented Workers Arrested in Record-Setting Immigration Sweep on the First Day of School*, CNN, Aug. 9, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/08/us/mississippi-immigration-raids-children/index.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Dianne Gallagher, *After Mississippi ICE Raids, Some Affected Children Still Are Without a Parent, Official Says*, CNN, Aug. 16, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/16/us/mississippi-ice-raids-children-separated/index.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Gomez, et al., *'I Thought She Was Going to Die': Parents Separated from Children After Mississippi ICE Raids*, Clarion Ledger, Aug. 24, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/08/24/mississippi-raids-ice-still-detaining-breastfeeding-single-parents/2096623001/>.

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Fowler, *'A Safe Place': Over 200 Students Absent After ICE Raids. Schools Reaching Out.*, Clarion Ledger, Aug. 9, 2019, <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2019/08/09/ice-raids-mississippi-students-immigration-children-schools/1965155001/>.

With hundreds of income earners now in detention, and nearly as many at home without jobs, families at home faced long-term emotional trauma and economic ruin.

Community organizations valiantly attempted to meet the gaping needs. Religious and other community groups organized food pantries, hot meals, and supplies for families left without an income.<sup>12</sup> Organizers and volunteers set up a community hotline and visited community members at home and in detention to assess needs and share information on resources and rights. Schools took extra measures to help students feel safe.<sup>13</sup> But at the federal level, all the government could do was hide behind cruelty, lies, and anti-immigrant accusations.

The federal government must ensure that family members left in the wake of immigration arrests receive the humanitarian support they need to survive. It should abolish immigration detention and grant all workers--whether in removal proceedings or not--easier access to work authorization to allow them to earn an income while they await the resolution of their cases. It must avoid separating children from their parents. If doing so is absolutely necessary for the well-being of the child, it must collaborate with the state's protective services to ensure children are in a safe, supportive environment that also meets their educational needs.

**Reform immigration laws that now are applied with “legality and little justice.”<sup>14</sup>**

The raids also underscored the need to overhaul our nation's unjust immigration system. Cardinal Álvaro Ramazzini of Guatemala, who visited the affected communities and met with MCJ in December, rightly characterized the US government officials as applying immigration laws with “legality and little justice.”<sup>15</sup>

The largest statewide raid in United States history triggered severely unjust prospects for those swept up by immigration enforcement officers. In addition to the raid's immediate effects, hundreds of those arrested on August 7 also now face lengthy removal proceedings to determine their fate in this country. They now face the threat of a lifetime of separation from their families, homes, and communities, and removal to countries where they may be persecuted, tortured, or killed. And even though many impacted immigrants may have strong defenses to stay in the country, they now face a convoluted and adversarial legal process that is increasingly unjust and hostile toward them.

The majority of the hundreds of individuals arrested on August 7 are indigenous Guatemalans and many have claims for protection under U.S. law. Many fled Guatemala during or shortly after the country's thirty-six-year civil war, in which over 200,000 Guatemalans were killed or

---

<sup>12</sup> Egan Millard, *Mississippi Churches Continue Support for Families Impacted by ICE Raids*, Episcopal News Service, Nov. 21, 2019, <https://www.episcopalnewservice.org/2019/11/21/mississippi-churches-continue-support-for-families-impacted-by-ice-raids/>.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Fowler, ‘A Safe Place’: Over 200 Students Absent After ICE Raids. Schools Reaching Out., Clarion Ledger, Aug. 9, 2019, <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2019/08/09/ice-raids-mississippi-students-immigration-children-schools/1965155001/>.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

disappeared.<sup>16</sup> According to Guatemala's Commission for Historical Clarification, which investigated the thousands of human rights violations following the war, “the violence was fundamentally directed by the State against the excluded, the poor and above all, the Mayan people, as well as those who fought for justice and greater social equality.”<sup>17</sup> Of the 42,275 victims identified by the Commission, 83% were Mayan.<sup>18</sup> While the ceasefire officially ended the war in 1996, the legacies of the violence remain, as indigenous Guatemalans continue to face widespread discrimination, forced evictions, severe poverty, and continued state-backed violence.

These atrocities hit many raids-impacted individuals in profound and terrifying ways, forcing them to seek protection in the United States, and eventually to make a home in Mississippi. During one legal clinic in Canton, one community member recounted witnessing the Guatemalan military rounding up and shooting his family members in front of him when he was a small child. He reported experiencing flashbacks when ICE agents stormed his workplace. A young woman, whose grandparents had also been murdered by the Guatemalan military in the 80s, had to flee her country last year when the government permitted a mining company to excavate in a predominantly indigenous community, forcibly displacing nearly all of the town's residents.

While many community members may have strong claims to asylum (or the related protections of withholding of removal or protection under the Convention Against Torture) on that basis, recent attempts to erode these well-established safeguards and to criminalize the lawful act of seeking asylum severely undermine the rule of law in our country.<sup>19</sup> For many, these protections, along with the due process rights guaranteed to *all* and that are fundamental to the rule of law in our country, are little more than an illusion and undermine the integrity of our entire legal system.

For one, on the day of the raids, over three hundred community members were detained and transferred to immigration detention facilities—many run by private prison companies known for egregious human rights violations—throughout the region.<sup>20</sup> Detained immigrants are far from their families, friends, and communities, where they spend weeks or months as *prisoners* while attempting to navigate the labyrinthine removal process alone, far removed from legal access or support. The imprisonment of so many immigration detainees in rural, isolated areas is by design. Far from access to legal resources and proof that can support their cases, detained immigrants continue fighting for their lives in removal proceedings while detained in these isolated prisons. Many do so with severe physical or emotional trauma from the persecution or

---

<sup>16</sup> Commission for Historical Clarification – Guatemala, *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, available at <https://hrdag.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/CEHreport-english.pdf>, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> *E.g.*, U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Proposed Rule: Procedures for Asylum and Withholding of Removal; Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear Review*, Federal Register, Jun. 15, 2020, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/06/15/2020-12575/procedures-for-asylum-and-withholding-of-removal-credible-fear-and-reasonable-fear-review>; *Matter of A-B-*, 27 I&N Dec. 316 (A.G. 2018).

<sup>20</sup> For a non-exhaustive list of reports (including several prepared by the U.S. government) chronicling rights abuses in U.S. immigration detention centers, please see National Immigrant Justice Center, “Recent Reports Documenting Abuse and Corruption in U.S. Immigration Jails, April 2019, available at this [link](#).

torture they fled.

Moreover, all immigrants in removal proceedings, whether detained or not, will face considerable barriers in the proceedings themselves. If they seek to defend themselves on asylum or other immigration protections, they must complete a detailed application, all in English, and translate all proof (which may include medical records and police reports) that is not already in English. The government does not provide assistance with completing these forms, so applicants, who often have no financial resources, often do not speak English, and are often not familiar with the US legal system, must rely on their friends or relatives or vie for assistance from overextended non-profits, many of whom still charge unreachable fees.

For those who successfully complete the application, they then face a daunting (and adversarial) hearing in Immigration Court, which is an administrative body under the Department of Justice. Although immigrants in removal proceedings have the right to counsel, an attorney will not be provided at the government's expense, so applicants must either hire a private attorney or locate an attorney or non-profit who is willing to take on the case for free. Because non-profits who handle asylum cases for free are rare, however, and certainly cannot meet the need, applicants are often forced to proceed alone. During these proceedings, which can span hours, applicants must explain in great detail the legal defense that would permit them to remain in the United States. This often requires that they recount their fears of returning to their home countries, reliving the trauma that they fled, and be knowledgeable in the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of US immigration law. Given the shortage of immigration judges and the rural nature of immigration detention centers, if the person is detained, these hearings are frequently conducted by video, with the judge appearing from a court hundreds of miles away and often with a poor video connection.<sup>21</sup> To make matters worse, with increasing pressure on Immigration Judges to meet government-established “case-completion” quotas, asylum hearings in immigration court become, as one Immigration Judge described it, “death penalty cases in a traffic court setting.”<sup>22</sup>

Even for those with the strongest claims and who have counsel, their chances for success may be non-existent from the beginning. According to data from Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), some area Immigration Judges boast a 98-100% denial rate.<sup>23</sup> These rates would be unheard of in other areas of law. This is in large part because immigration courts lack meaningful independent review: both the immigration courts and the first level of appellate review, the Board of Immigration Appeals, are under the control and influence of the Department of Justice, often rubber stamping the Attorney General's own agenda. Applicants do not obtain independent judicial review—to the federal circuit courts—until their *second* appeal, which is out of reach of many immigrants, given the scarcity of attorneys who handle these cases for free and the length of time they take. Therefore, even

---

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Franklin, Miriam Annenberg, and Ankur Singh, *Video hearings in immigration court are harming immigrants' cases*, *Pacific Standard*, 2 Jul. 2019, available at <https://psmag.com/social-justice/video-hearings-in-immigration-court-are-harming-immigrants-cases>.

<sup>22</sup> Maria Sacchetti, “Immigration judges say proposed quotas from Justice Dept. threaten judicial independence,” *Washington Post*, 12 October 2017, available at this [link](#); Immigration Judge Dana Leigh Marks, *How a ‘dire’ immigration court backlog affects lives*, *PBS Newshour*, 18 Sept. 2017, available at this [link](#).

<sup>23</sup> Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) – Syracuse University, “Immigration Judge Reports – Asylum,” *TRAC Immigration*, available at <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/judgereports/>.

Immigration Court and Board of Immigration Appeals decisions that blatantly violate the law often go completely unchecked.

For these reasons, the federal government must overhaul our nation's unjust immigration removal system. It must establish an independent immigration court and Board of Immigration Appeals, separate from the Department of Justice, to allow judges to apply immigration laws in a fair and equitable manner and without executive interference. It must protect the due process rights of respondents in immigration court by facilitating pro bono representation and language access and supporting self-help programs such as the Legal Orientation Program. And finally, it must ensure meaningful protections for those fleeing persecution and torture in their countries of citizenship.

### **Defuse the “time bombs” in immigration detention and the workplace<sup>24</sup>**

With the arrival of 2020, the world faced a deadly global pandemic, COVID-19. As the virus began spreading throughout the state, it hit the raids-impacted communities especially hard, highlighting the tremendous health disparities that face Latinos in our state and nation.

In March, medical experts sounded the alarm of the devastating effects COVID-19 would have in immigration detention facilities, where dozens of raids-impacted individuals who had been denied bond remained detained. These experts warned Congress that detention facilities' close, unhygienic living quarters and constant movement of detained people and staff would create a “tinderbox scenario” should COVID-19 spread to those locations.<sup>25</sup> In fact, one April model estimated that 72-100% of immigrant detainees would contract the virus.<sup>26</sup> Mississippi raids victims observed that in one local detention center, “[n]o one is using masks; nothing is being disinfected. [ . . . ] [G]uards come and go in the same clothes, they touch everything without hand sanitizer. It's a time bomb.”<sup>27</sup> In another jail, a raids victim found that “[t]he most I've seen anybody be able to access in that prison is ibuprofen. For this disease, that's not going to save your life.”<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, these fears quickly came to pass for many Mississippians detained after the raids.

---

<sup>24</sup> Hilda Jorge Perez quoted in *'It's a Time Bomb': ICE Detainees Seek Release amid Growing Coronavirus Fears*, THE WASHINGTON POST, Apr. 12, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/ice-coronavirus-detention-centers-release/2020/04/08/f4dcaef8-74ee-11ea-87da-77a8136c1a6d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/ice-coronavirus-detention-centers-release/2020/04/08/f4dcaef8-74ee-11ea-87da-77a8136c1a6d_story.html).

<sup>25</sup> Catherine E. Shoichet, *Doctors Warn of 'Tinderbox Scenario' if Coronavirus Spreads in ICE Detention*, CNN, Mar. 20, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/20/health/doctors-ice-detention-coronavirus/index.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Anagha Srikanth, *Could ICE Detention Centers Be the Next Coronavirus Hotbed?*, THE HILL, Apr. 28, 2020, <https://thehill.com/changing-america/respect/diversity-inclusion/495145-could-ice-detention-centers-be-the-next>.

<sup>27</sup> Hilda Jorge Perez quoted in *'It's a Time Bomb': ICE Detainees Seek Release amid Growing Coronavirus Fears*, THE WASHINGTON POST, Apr. 12, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/ice-coronavirus-detention-centers-release/2020/04/08/f4dcaef8-74ee-11ea-87da-77a8136c1a6d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/ice-coronavirus-detention-centers-release/2020/04/08/f4dcaef8-74ee-11ea-87da-77a8136c1a6d_story.html).

<sup>28</sup> Francisca Morales Díaz quoted in Alissa Zhu, *For Mississippi's Undocumented Immigrants, Threat of Coronavirus Is 'Extremely Ugly'*, CLARION LEDGER, Mar. 28, 2020, <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2020/03/28/mississippi-ice-raid-communities-grapple-economy-coronavirus/5083513002/>.

Pedro Vásquez suffered a sore throat and cough for weeks before being quarantined and testing positive.<sup>29</sup> Officers dragged the gravely ill Salomón Diego Alonzo into his deportation hearing, which the Immigration Judge begrudgingly reset only because Salomón lacked the lung capacity to testify.<sup>30</sup>

The virus also placed a considerable strain on raids victims who had been released. As the economy slowed, individuals and families already struggling from the raids faced a deepening financial crisis.<sup>31</sup> Like the detention centers, COVID-19 also spread easily throughout the close confines of central Mississippi's chicken plants, infecting hundreds in the area.<sup>32</sup> While Pedro Vásquez was ill in detention, his partner, Zoila Orozco, who worked at Koch Foods, tested positive in Morton.<sup>33</sup> With both spouses infected, Pedro feared the worst and wept. “I just think about my son. What is he going to do all by himself?”<sup>34</sup>

These outbreaks in immigration detention and the chicken plants highlight the tremendous health disparities that minorities nationwide--including the raids victims--face. According to a July CDC study, among the meat and poultry processing plants reviewed in the 28-state study, 87% of positive COVID-19 cases occurred among racial or ethnic minorities (where race or ethnicity was reported).<sup>35</sup>

The government must act to defuse these ticking time bombs and to reduce the health disparities

---

<sup>29</sup> Mica Rosenberg, *Special Report: Immigrant Couple Face Double Jeopardy in U.S. Coronavirus Epidemic*, REUTERS, May 14, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-meatpacking-family/special-report-immigrant-couple-face-double-jeopardy-in-u-s-coronavirus-epidemic-iduskbn22q1vo>.

<sup>30</sup> Nomaan Merchant, *Detained Migrant with COVID-19 Forced to Call into Court*, AP, Apr. 17, 2020, <https://apnews.com/1b4254ac7245200fa61dce79aa38de15>.

<sup>31</sup> Alissa Zhu, *For Mississippi's Undocumented Immigrants, Threat of Coronavirus Is 'Extremely Ugly'*, Clarion Ledger, Mar. 28, 2020, <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2020/03/28/mississippi-ice-raid-communities-grapple-economy-coronavirus/5083513002/>.

<sup>32</sup> Mica Rosenberg, *Special Report: Immigrant Couple Face Double Jeopardy in U.S. Coronavirus Epidemic*, REUTERS, May 14, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-meatpacking-family/special-report-immigrant-couple-face-double-jeopardy-in-u-s-coronavirus-epidemic-iduskbn22q1vo>; Mississippi State Department of Health, *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)*, [https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/\\_static/14\\_0\\_420.html](https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/14_0_420.html) (last accessed Jul. 30, 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Pedro Vásquez quoted in Mica Rosenberg, *Special Report: Immigrant Couple Face Double Jeopardy in U.S. Coronavirus Epidemic*, REUTERS, May 14, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-meatpacking-family/special-report-immigrant-couple-face-double-jeopardy-in-u-s-coronavirus-epidemic-iduskbn22q1vo>.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> Waltenburg MA, Victoroff T, Rose CE, et al. *Update: COVID-19 Among Workers in Meat and Poultry Processing Facilities — United States*, MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020;69:887-892, Apr.-May 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6927e2>. Specifically, the study found that “The effects of COVID-19 on racial and ethnic minority groups are not yet fully understood; however, current data indicate a disproportionate burden of illness and death among these populations (4,5). Among animal slaughtering and processing workers from the 21 states included in this report whose race/ethnicity were known, approximately 39% were white, 30% were Hispanic, 25% were black, and 6% were Asian. However, among 9,919 workers with COVID-19 with race/ethnicity reported, approximately 56% were Hispanic, 19% were black, 13% were white, and 12% were Asian, suggesting that Hispanic and Asian workers might be disproportionately affected by COVID-19 in this workplace setting.”

in our country. ICE must drastically reduce--and ultimately eliminate--immigration detention, which unnecessarily subjects non-criminal detainees to overcrowding, unhygienic conditions, and vulnerabilities to public health crises such as COVID-19. In addition, the government must enforce, instead of waive, safeguards for meat and poultry processing workers by requiring that companies provide PPE to workers and reduce overcrowding, while providing employment protections to workers who are ill or must care for others.

**Go the source of the problem – enforcements that “have a perp walk for employers.”<sup>36</sup>**

While Mississippi communities suffered, families remained separated, and indictments against workers mounted, executives from the raided companies—some with documented histories of serious labor abuses—continued in their daily comforts.<sup>37</sup> One year after the raids, only four indictments of mid-level managers have followed, and no senior executives or corporations themselves face direct criminal jeopardy.<sup>38</sup> As one community member lamented at an MCJ legal clinic, “We have given them so much for so many years and we only got a little pay and a lot of abuse in return. Now I have an ankle bracelet, my husband is in jail, and they're sitting at home eating dinner with their families.”

Three months after the raids, the House Committee on Homeland Security—chaired by Congressman Bennie G. Thompson of Mississippi—held a field hearing at Tougaloo College to examine the raids' long-lasting impact on children and communities.<sup>39</sup> The Mississippi Center for Justice's Immigration Campaign Director, Amelia McGowan, submitted written testimony outlining our activities and observations.<sup>40</sup> During the hearing, Jere Miles, the special agent in charge of the New Orleans office of Homeland Security Investigations, testified that he believed that the raids were a “good deterrent.”<sup>41</sup> Members of Congress rightly slammed the Department of Homeland Security for the action. Representative Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas called the

---

<sup>36</sup> Representative Al Green quoted in Alissa Zhu, *Lawmakers Grill Agent in Hearing on MS ICE Raids: 'You Picked on the Undocumented Persons'*, CLARION LEDGER, Nov. 8, 2019, <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2019/11/08/lawmakers-grill-agent-during-hearing-mississippi-ice-raids/2521307001/>.

<sup>37</sup> Ray Sanchez, *Indictments of Workers Mount after the Mississippi Immigration Raids, but No Employers Have Been Charged*, CNN, Aug. 21, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/21/us/mississippi-ice-raids-employers/index.html>; Micah Rosenberg & Kristina Cooke, *Allegations of Labor Abuses Dogged Mississippi Plant Years Before Immigration Raids*, Aug. 9, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-koch-foods/allegations-of-labor-abuses-dogged-mississippi-plant-years-before-immigration-raids-idUSKCN1UZ1OV>.

<sup>38</sup> Emily Wagster Pettus, *Four Poultry Plant Execs Indicted after 2019 Immigration Raid*, Jackson Free Press August 7, 2020 <https://www.jacksonfreepress.com/news/2020/aug/07/four-poultry-plant-execs-indicted-after-2019-immig/>

<sup>39</sup> House Committee on Homeland Security, *Thursday: Thompson to Hold Field Hearing on Mississippi ICE Raids*, 5 Nov. 2019, <https://homeland.house.gov/news/media-advisories/thursday-thompson-to-hold-field-hearing-on-mississippi-ice-raids>.

<sup>40</sup> Amelia S. McGowan, *Testimony Before the U.S. House of Representatives Homeland Security Committee*, Nov. 7 2019, <https://mscenterforjustice.org/2019-11-21-united-states-house-of-representatives-homeland-security-committee-immigration-raids-impacts-and-aftermath-on-mississippi-communities/>.

<sup>41</sup> Alissa Zhu, *Lawmakers Grill Agent in Hearing on MS ICE Raids: 'You Picked on The Undocumented Persons'*, CLARION LEDGER, Nov. 8, 2019, <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2019/11/08/lawmakers-grill-agent-during-hearing-mississippi-ice-raids/2521307001/>.



raids “one of the, or maybe the most cruel and inhumane forms of government action that I have seen in a very long time.”<sup>42</sup> Representative Al Green of Texas called out the agency for its disparate treatment of workers and employers:

You don't have a perp walk for the employers. They don't get arrested. You don't handcuff them and take them away... You knew before you came that laws were being broken, but you picked on the undocumented persons.<sup>43</sup>

Attacking undocumented workers while allowing employers to continue their abusive and exploitative practices highlights the glaring inequalities and hypocrisy in our country's immigration system. The government must fully investigate abuse and exploitation at Mississippi's chicken plants and pursue the appropriate civil and criminal avenues against employers for their role in this crisis.

---

This report was prepared by Amelia McGowan, Director of Immigration Campaign for Mississippi Center for Justice, with support from Max Myers, staff attorney. Our appreciation goes out to our partners in the Legal Immigration Coalition, ACLU of Mississippi, attorney Jeremy Jong, New Orleans, McArthur Justice Center at University of Mississippi, El Pueblo, Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance, Southeast Immigrant Rights Network, and Southern Poverty Law Center. Thanks also to our pro bono volunteer attorneys, to the Mississippi Access to Justice Commission, and to We the Action for your support. Finally, we thank and pay tribute to our many community organizing partners in the Mississippi Immigration Coalition.

For more information on our Immigration law campaign, or to volunteer or donate to the work of the Mississippi Center for Justice, please go to the following links.

Immigration Campaign information is [here](#).

Information on how to get involved with our work is [here](#).

Donate to the Immigration Campaign (specify immigration in your donation) [here](#).

---

<sup>42</sup> Representative Sheila Jackson Lee quoted in *Id.*

<sup>43</sup> Representative Al Green quoted in *Id.*