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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–3304

November 17, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Mullin,

We write with serious concern about the imminent reopening of the former Rivers Correctional Institution in Winton, North Carolina, as an immigration detention center operated by the GEO Group. The facility would open during the deadliest period for people in ICE custody in more than two decades, at a site with a documented history of violence and medical neglect, run by a contractor whose facilities are currently under state investigation. We respectfully request answers on the decision to reopen Rivers and how ICE intends to uphold detainee dignity, rights, health, and safety.

The opening of this facility is the latest product of a costly detention expansion agenda. Earlier this year, ICE spent $1.07 billion to convert 11 warehouses into mass detention centers, a plan ultimately scrapped amid public opposition and the department's own failure to conduct appropriate due diligence and planning.[1] According to the Government Accountability Office's report released September 24th 2026, ICE has already spent millions of dollars more that it will not recover on those warehouses, leading to wasted taxpayer funds on failed initiatives.[2] ICE has also spent over $1.5 billion to purchase shuttered private prisons from CoreCivic[3], and separately contracted with GEO Group to re-open the Rivers Correctional Institution in Winton, North Carolina, as the Winton ICE Processing Center. [4] As per the agreement, the GEO Group will maintain ownership of Rivers and manage the facility, which is expected to generate approximately $80 million in revenue for GEO Group in its first full year of operation.[5]

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[1] U.S. Gov't Accountability Off., GAO-26-108663, Immigration Detention: Urgent Planning Needed to Avoid Further Waste of Taxpayer Dollars 8, 13 (2026), https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-108663.pdf.

[2] Fernanda Santos, ICE Wasted Millions in Rapid Push to Expand Detention Capacity, Watchdog Finds, Axios (Sept. 25, 2026), https://axios.com/2026/09/25/ice-detention-expansion-waste-gao-report.

[3] Philip Wang, Why ICE Is Quietly Buying Up Private Detention Centers, TIME (Aug. 4, 2026), https://time.com/article/2026/08/04/ice-detention-strategy-private-prisons-immigration-deportation/

[4] Brandon Kingdollar, ICE Expected to Open Mass Detention Facility in NC, Sparking Anger, Pushback, NC Newsline (July 24, 2026),https://ncnewsline.com/2026/07/24/ice-expected-to-open-mass-detention-facility-in-nc-sparking-anger-pushback/.

[5] Press Release, The GEO Group, Inc., The GEO Group Reports Second Quarter Results and Updates Full Year 2026 Guidance (Aug. 2026),https://investors.geogroup.com/news-releases/news-release-details/geo-group-reports-second-quarter-results-and-updates-full-year.

At a time when North Carolina families are struggling with the rising cost of housing, health care, and groceries, private prison companies are receiving billions of dollars in federal funds. North Carolinians deserve robust investment in needed infrastructure and economic opportunities, not federal subsidization of a new detention facility, which will likely strain already limited resources and overwhelm the sheriff's office, emergency medical services, and the local hospital.

Rivers' record is well known. A 2016 Department of Justice review of privately operated federal prisons found Rivers had high rates of inmate-on-inmate violence, sexual misconduct, contraband, and positive drug tests.[6] In a 2007 class action lawsuit, people incarcerated there alleged a pattern of denied medical treatment that led to severe injury and, in some cases, death.[7] While the GEO Group was dismissed from that suit before those claims were resolved, we are disturbed that the same company is poised to reopen the same facility.[8]

GEO's current record offers no reassurance. At least 10 people died in GEO-operated facilities in 2025, and deaths have continued in 2026.[9] At Delaney Hall in Newark, New Jersey, Jovanny Lopez Cornejo died in August.[10] His mother said he was not receiving his daily medication for diabetes and high blood pressure and had complained of numbness in his face and hand.[11] When New Jersey health inspectors arrived at Delaney Hall in May, they were barred from the medical unit, sleeping areas, and bathrooms, and they have not been granted a full inspection since, prompting a state lawsuit and a civil rights investigation into GEO employees' treatment of detainees.[12] At GEO's Adelanto facility in California, Alberto Gutierrez-Reyes died in February; a Los Angeles City Council member has said he was denied medical care.[13]

A company that blocks state health inspectors from auditing their facilities should not be entrusted with more lives in North Carolina without rigorous, transparent oversight.

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[6] U.S. Dep't of Justice, Office of the Inspector General, Review of the Federal Bureau of Prisons' Monitoring of Contract Prisons, at 31 (Aug. 2016), https://www.privateprisonnews.org/media/publications/Review%20of%20the%20Federal%20Bureau%20of%20Prisons%20Monitoring%20of%20Contract%20Prisons,%20DOJ%20OIG,%202016.pdf.

[7] Brandon Kingdollar, ICE Expected to Open Mass Detention Facility in NC, Sparking Anger, Pushback, NC Newsline (July 24, 2026, 7:18 PM), https://ncnewsline.com/2026/07/24/ice-expected-to-open-mass-detention-facility-in-nc-sparking-anger-pushback/.

[8] *Id.*

[9] UCLA Behind Bars Data Project, ICE Deaths in Custody,https://uclaprisondata.org/ice-deaths-in-custody (last visited Oct. 2, 2026).

[10] Amol Sinha, A Congressman Said Reports of Deadly Conditions at an ICE Detention Center Were a "False Narrative." Then Two More People Died., ACLU of N.J. (2026),https://www.aclu-nj.org/news/a-congressman-said-reports-of-deadly-conditions-at-an-ice-detention-center-were-a-false-narrative-then-two-more-people-died/.

[11] *Id.*

[12] Press Release, N.J. Dep't of Health, New Jersey Sues Delaney Hall Operator After It Refuses Full Access to Health Inspectors (June 2, 2026), https://www.nj.gov/health/news/2026/20260602a.shtml.

[13] Marc Cota-Robles, *Westlake Man Dies While in ICE Custody at Adelanto Detention Center, LA Councilmember Says*, ABC7 Los Angeles (Mar. 3, 2026), https://abc7.com/post/alberto-gutierrez-reyes-westlake-dies-ice-custody-adelanto-facility-according-la-councilmember-eunisses-hernandez/18672280/.

To that end we request written responses to the following inquiries by November 30, 2026:

Opening, Capacity, & Facility Operations

1. What is the current status of ICE's contract with GEO Group for the Winton facility, and when will it begin receiving detainees?
    a. Will the facility open at full capacity or phase in its detained population? If phased, what is the anticipated timeline for reaching full operational capacity?
    b. Please provide a copy of the contract, including its term, per-diem rate, and any guaranteed minimum occupancy provision.
2. How many full-time and part-time correctional staff will be employed at Rivers?
3. What population will Rivers house (men, women, children)?
4. Are there any categories of detained individuals that Rivers will not be equipped or authorized to house? (ex. Pregnant people, people living with disabilities, unaccompanied minors, people with certain security-classifications, etc.)
5. What ICE AOR (Area of Responsibility) and ERO (Enforcement Removal Operations) field office will be in control of this facility?
6. Does ICE anticipate that Rivers will operate as a regional facility? If so, serving which state populations?
7. Which detention standards (NDS 2025, PBNDS 2011, or other) will govern the facility, and will ICE or an independent body complete a pre-occupancy inspection? If such an inspection was already completed, please provide the results.

Legal Access & Immigration Court

8. How many private attorney-client visitation rooms will be available?
9. Will Rivers participate in ICE's Virtual Attorney Visitation program? If so, how many confidential video stations will be available?
10. In what immigration court will cases for individuals detained in this facility take place?
11. Will immigration hearings for individuals detained at Rivers occur in person, by video teleconference, or both?
12. Will legal organizations be permitted to conduct Know Your Rights presentations?

Medical and Mental Health Care

13. What medical staffing levels are required under the contract, including physicians, nurses, and mental health professionals?
14. Will Rivers be contracting with an outside provider for medical or mental health services? If so, who?
15. Will medical personnel be physically present on-site 24/7 for medical emergencies?
16. What are the nearest hospitals capable of emergency and specialty care, what are the transport times, and what protocols govern emergency transfers?
17. How many mental health beds will be available?
18. How many restrictive-housing or solitary confinement beds will be available?
19. Did ICE evaluate the 2016 DOJ findings and the 2007 medical care litigation at Rivers when deciding to contract for this site?

a. What, if any, corrective measures has GEO Group committed to?

20. What steps has ICE taken to review GEO Group's medical care practices in light of deaths at Delaney Hall and Adelanto?
21. Given the state of New Jersey's litigation over access to Delaney Hall, will ICE require GEO Group to permit unannounced inspections by state and local health authorities at Winton?
22. Will any inspections as to facility fitness/safety be conducted prior to opening?

Community Impact

23. Have any evaluations been made regarding the impact that the re-opening of Rivers will have on the infrastructure of Winton and the surrounding area (e.g. traffic, emergency services, hospital capacity)?
24. What agreement, if any, has ICE or GEO reached with local entities regarding services associated with Rivers? (ex. EMS providers, local law enforcement, hospitals, local government)
25. Will local government or service providers receive federal reimbursement for costs associated with Rivers?

We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Valerie P. Foushee
Member of Congress

Deborah Ross
Member of Congress

Alma Adams
Member of Congress