

JUNE 30, 1999

SCHAKOWSKY MEETS WITH INS CHICAGO DISTRICT DIRECTOR TO EXPRESS OUTRAGE ABOUT CONDITIONS FACING ASYLUM SEEKERS, ESPECIALLY WOMEN AND CHILDREN

WASHINGTON, D.C. U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) met on Monday with Brian Perryman, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Chicago District Director, to express outrage at the conditions and treatment of asylum seekers.

Schakowsky specifically expressed concerns about women and their children who are being detained in separate facilities, the lack of suitable facilities for women asylum seekers, the lack of legal presentation and the detention of asylees in city jails. Perryman agreed to work closely with Schakowsky and immigration and human rights advocates to take the necessary steps to improve conditions.

In a letter to Perryman following the meeting, Schakowsky listed specific conditions in the INS contract facilities and identified problems that need to be addressed immediately.

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Below is the letter to Perryman.

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*Mr. Brian Perryman, District Director
Immigration and Naturalization Service, Chicago Region
10 W. Jackson, Suite 600
Chicago, IL 60604*

Dear Mr. Perryman:

Thank you for meeting with me on Monday regarding detention issues. I have deep concerns about the way that asylum seekers in detention are treated and the conditions that they face, and I am glad that we agreed on many of the steps that must be taken to improve these conditions.

In response to my concern about women and their children who are seeking asylum being detained in separate facilities, you agreed to try to find a suitable facility in the Chicago area to house women and children together. You and your staff agreed to work with the INS Central Region and Bob Esbrook, the Director of the Chicago Office of Asylum, on this matter. We discussed the possibility of utilizing the local facility that was previously used to house women and children together. Please let me know if this is a possibility and what some other options might be.

You also offered to work with Mr. Esbrook to decrease the number of days that asylum seekers who pass their credible fear interview remain in detention, within the mandates of the law. I strongly support this effort. Please keep me updated on the status of these discussions.

Regarding the specific conditions in the INS contract facilities in the area, you agreed to immediately look into the problems that have been identified. Too many asylum seekers in detention have:

- No access to exercise, recreational and educational activities***
- No access to the outdoors and natural light***
- To stay in overcrowded cells***
- No regular access to telephones for either outgoing or incoming calls***
- No access to daily showers and changes of clothes***
- Little access to translators***
- No access to their belongings***
- To stay in cells and be mingled with criminals and INS detainees awaiting criminal trial***
- No access to legal information or know-your-rights presentations, and no communication regarding options for legal assistance***
- No private space to meet with attorneys or family***
- No notification as to why they are detained, why they are moved to different facilities and what the process is for their hearing or credible fear interview***
- No access to therapists or psychological services***
- To be physically restrained unnecessarily, as when they are shackled in court***

The lack of suitable detention facilities for women in the area is also of great concern to me. You agreed to review suggestions from Community Organizations of facilities in the Chicago area that could more appropriately house women asylum seekers than city jails. Mary Meg McCarthy from the Midwest Immigrant Rights Center offered to give you suggestions of facilities. Please keep me updated on the status of this process.

On the subject of the strong need for asylum seekers to know their legal rights and the legal processes they must go through, you stated that you wanted to implement know-your-rights presentations in the Chicago region immediately. Your office agreed to follow up with Mary Meg McCarthy and my office by the end of this week. I also raised my concern that attorneys are not being notified when their clients are transferred, and you said that it is your policy to do so and that you would see that this policy is implemented immediately.

We discussed the issue of Community-Based Organizations (CBO's) who are not certified by the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) no longer being able to attend CBO meetings with your office. I understand that this decision was made to combat fraud, and I agree that this is a very serious issue that must be addressed and dealt with. However, I want to reiterate my concern that many of the groups that will be barred from these important meetings may not be in a position to gain BIA certification, but are still valid organizations who benefit their communities and your office by helping to educate

immigrants. I appreciate that you are planning on implementing a Director's Round Table to discuss broader policy issues with advocates, but I believe that the CBO nuts-and-bolts meetings are valuable to a vast number of the local groups who may not be involved in these broader discussions. I encourage you to find a solution that meets the goal of combating fraud while sharing valuable information with valid community groups who serve the immigrant population.

Thank you also for the brief tour of the facility at 10 West Jackson. I will contact your office regarding tours of INS detention facilities and contract detention facilities.

Finally, I appreciated our discussion of the line at the INS facility at 10 West Jackson. You stated that, by mid-July, you would be moving many of the cases that applicants now wait in line to file to a direct mail system, with scheduled interviews. You also indicated that you would have forms available at the beginning of the line in the near future. I am encouraged by these measures, but while they are steps in the right direction, I'm looking forward to working with you on further actions to build a customer-friendly atmosphere at the INS in Chicago.

I am eager to work with you on all the above issues, and I appreciated the opportunity to discuss them with you this week.

Sincerely,

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*Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress* □