



National News

Faith groups decry immigration detention of pregnant women

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WASHINGTON (CNS) — A coalition of groups objected to the detention of pregnant women by U.S. immigration officials, saying that they are deeply concerned “about detention conditions.”

Representatives of the organizations focused their concerns on a “lack of adequate prenatal and health care, reports of medical negligence, and unsafe, stressful conditions for mother and baby,” saying that the detention policy was not pro-life.

About 250 faith leaders representing numerous faith groups sent a letter outlining their objections April 30 to Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials. Representing the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, the leaders expressed “shock and outrage about the ICE’s decision to eliminate the presumption of release for pregnant women from immigrant detention, except in extraordinary circumstances,” in an April 30 statement.

ICE officials in March announced that more than 500 pregnant women had been detained under a policy finalized in December that directed agents to detain pregnant immigrant women who, under President Barack Obama’s administration, were to be released if they landed in the custody of immigration officials.

The policy is part of a government crackdown on people in the United States illegally since President Donald Trump took office in January 2017.

“We are deeply troubled by the cruel ICE directive which eliminates the presumption that ICE should not detain pregnant women except in extraordinary circumstances, and also removes some requirements regarding treatment of pregnant women in detention,” Sister Marie Lucey, a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia and a staff member of the Franciscan Action Network, a Washington-based group that signed the letter, said in a statement. “Not only our religious faith, but our belief in basic human rights of all people, requires us to challenge this inhumane directive which endangers the lives of vulnerable pregnant women.”

Lawrence Couch, director of the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, a group that also signed the letter, said in a statement that “respect for life and the dignity of the human person are foundational to our Catholic faith and also to the U.S. Constitution.”

“We have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness according to the Declaration of Independence. There is no reference to borders or papers. Our foundations will crumble if we withdraw our compassion for the other. Nothing exemplifies this more than the unnecessary detention of pregnant women,” he said.

“The United States is a nation based on family, which includes a commitment to care for pregnant women and their children,” Sister Simone Campbell, executive director of the Network, a Catholic social justice lobbying organization, also said in a statement. “Yet ICE made the dangerous decision to hold pregnant women in detention centers with

substandard health facilities, risking the lives of both mother and child. This Trump policy is a rejection of a pro-life stance and must be changed.”

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