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New Family Detention Standards Incorporate Women's Commission's Recommendations on Treatment of Immigrant and Refugee Families

Women's Commission Calls Standards "A Step in the Right Direction"

New York, NY, January 11, 2008 – The Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency today released new standards for immigrant and refugee families in detention that take into account some of the comments and recommendations made by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children and other nongovernmental organizations.

"The new standards represent a welcome improvement over current practices in family detention facilities but still fall far short of ensuring appropriate conditions for families," said Michelle Brané, director of the Women's Commission's detention and asylum program.

The recommendations from the Women's Commission that were accepted by DHS include a modification limiting strip searches on minors and provisions that children shall not be woken or disturbed during night census counts unless exigent circumstances exist.

The standards will be implemented initially at the T. Don Hutto Residential Center in Taylor, Texas, and the Berks Country Family Residential center in Pennsylvania, the only two family facilities currently in use. The Hutto Center, a former medium-security prison came under intense scrutiny when the Women's Commission and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services released a report on unacceptable conditions at the facility. The February 2007 report, *Locking Up Family Values: The Detention of Immigrant Families*, highlighted the lack of standards and recommended that appropriate standards be developed and implemented.

"We commend the Department of Homeland Security for drafting standards that will improve these facilities," Brané said. "However, we continue to be concerned with many provisions of the standards, particularly that they allow children to be disciplined based on adult prison protocol, including the use of restraints, steel batons and strip searches."

The Women's Commission continues to believe that detention should be a policy of last resort where families are concerned. But in those limited cases where detention may be necessary, the organization calls on the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency to ensure that the conditions are appropriate. It described these new standards as a step in the right direction, and expressed hope that the agency will continue to work with the Commission to resolve the remaining issues.

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The ICE standards on family detention are available at www.ice.gov/pi/familyresidential/index.htm
The report *Locking Up Family Values: The Detention of Immigrant Families* is available at <http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/famdeten.pdf>