

PRESS RELEASE: University of Arizona Report Documents Poor Conditions for Women in Immigration Detention Facilities in the State

CONTACT: Nina Rabin, Director of Border Research for the Southwest Institute for Research on Women and Co-Director of the Immigration Law Clinic, James E. Rogers College of Law, rabin@email.arizona.edu, (520) 621-9206

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A report released today by the Southwest Institute for Research on Women and the Bacon Immigration Law and Policy Program describes harsh conditions of confinement for the roughly three hundred women housed in immigration detention facilities in Arizona. The report, *Unseen Prisoners: A Report on Women in Immigration Detention Facilities in Arizona*, is based on over a year of research, including over 40 interviews with detainees, their family members, attorneys, and service providers.

“Few people realize that we are locking up huge numbers of immigrants every day and holding them for months and in some cases years at a time. They are not being punished for a crime, and yet they are held in facilities that are identical to, and often double as, prisons or jails,” said Nina Rabin, the lead researcher and author of the report. “Women immigration detainees in particular are an invisible population. We hope this report will raise awareness about women locked up just an hour away from here in conditions that would shock most Americans. We also hope to raise awareness about the U.S. citizen children separated from their mothers right now because of immigration detention.”

The report provides detailed information about day-to-day life in the three facilities that house women immigration detainees in Arizona: Central Arizona Detention Center, Pinal County Jail, and Eloy Detention Center. Rabin and several University of Arizona law students conducted interviews and extensive background research for the report over a twelve month period between August 2007 and August 2008. Rabin described the study’s participants: “In our small sample size of detainees who agreed to participate in this research study, we encountered pregnant and nursing mothers, domestic violence victims, low-wage workers swept up in worksite raids, and asylum-seekers fleeing persecution and sexual violence.”

The federal agency in charge of the detention and removal of immigrants, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), contracts for two of the facilities to be run by the private prison company the Corrections Corporation of America. In the case of Pinal County Jail, ICE contracts with the county. ICE permitted the researchers access to two of the three facilities, but declined requests to interview ICE representatives or facility personnel for the report. Rabin met with ICE representatives in December to discuss the report’s findings and recommendations.

Key findings of the report include:

- **Family separation:** The majority of women interviewed were separated from at least one U.S. citizen child under the age of 10 and were transferred to

Arizona from out of state. As a result, they were hundreds or at times thousands of miles away from their families and communities during their time in detention.

- **Severe penal conditions for women who are not serving criminal sentences:** Women described conditions of confinement that are in many cases more restrictive than in county jails or prisons, including limited access to recreation, a complete absence of programming or activities, frugal provision of food and other supplies, and the routine use of strip searches and shackling during transport.
- **Aggressive government prosecution and detention of women who pose no security threat or flight risk:** Attorneys reported that ICE routinely appeals decisions to release pregnant women on bond; rejects or does not respond to applications for humanitarian parole of victims of domestic violence, refugees, or women with serious health conditions; and refuses to reduce bonds for families unable to pay.
- **Inadequate medical care:** Women reported inadequate gynecological and obstetrical care, long waits for medical attention, and dismissive responses to medical requests.

The report contains detailed recommendations for Congress, the Department of Homeland Security, ICE, and the individual facilities researched. Recommendations range from broad policy changes, including the need for increased consideration of the impact of immigration detention on families, to specific facility-level concerns, such as the lack of outdoor recreation in Pinal County Jail.

The report will be available beginning on January 13, 2009, at <http://www.law.arizona.edu/depts/clinics/ilc/UnseenPrisoners.pdf>.

For more information, please contact Nina Rabin at (520) 621-9206 or rabin@email.arizona.edu.

The Southwest Institute for Research on Women (SIROW) is a regional research and resource center in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Arizona.

The Bacon Immigration Law and Policy Program is a new interdisciplinary program at the University of Arizona's James E. Rogers College of Law.