

## Statement on the Allegation of Mass Forced Hysterectomies Performed on Immigrant Women at the Irwin County Detention Center

Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach (APILO) joins other local and national immigrant and human rights organizations' call for the swift and transparent investigation of allegations of unlawful performance of hysterectomies without informed consent on immigrant women\* at the Irwin County Detention Center (ICDC).

In a complaint filed on Monday, September 14, 2020, Dawn Wooten, a Black woman who was a licensed practical nurse at Irwin County Detention Center, reported that an unusually high number of immigrant women\* had been subjected to hysterectomy surgery with no explanation by a doctor who is not even certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ABOG). Ms. Wooten also blew the whistle on the systematic medical neglect under ICE custody at ICDC, such as the “refusal to test detained immigrants for COVID-19 who have been exposed to the virus and are symptomatic, shredding of medical requests submitted by detained immigrants, and fabricating medical records.”

Ms. Wooten's courageous decision to speak out against the abuse of immigrant women\* of color raises important issues of gender and racial justice, as her allegations against ICDC should not be understood without scrutinizing the history of eugenics laws and the documented record of the systematic practice of forced sterilization on poor women\* of color in the United States. The alleged mass hysterectomies being performed at ICDC reminds us of the case *Madrigal v. Qulligan*, the 1978 federal class action lawsuit from Los Angeles County, in which many poor, monolingual Spanish speaking Latina immigrant women, who were subjected to forced sterilization, bravely spoke out against the violation of their physical integrity. Furthermore, after the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the eugenics science and the right of an individual state to forcibly sterilize any woman “afflicted with an hereditary form of insanity or imbecility” in *Buck v. Bell* in 1927, a highly disproportionate number of black women in the South were targeted for coerced sterilization. In 1976, the U.S. government admitted performing forced sterilization on more than 3,400 indigenous women between 1973 and 1976, after the passage of the Family Planning Services and Population Research Act of 1970.

Given these histories, APILO applauds and supports the House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's statement demanding the immediate investigation of the allegations by Ms. Wooten; if found true, they would be “a staggering abuse of human rights” of vulnerable immigrant women\*. There are concrete actions you can take to continue your actions of solidarity with Black and brown communities, particularly those incarcerated and/or in immigration detention.

1. Demand the transparent and thorough investigation of Ms. Wooten's allegations by contacting Joseph V. Cuffari, Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security: (202) 981-6000, [dhs-oig.officepublicaffairs@oig.dhs.gov](mailto:dhs-oig.officepublicaffairs@oig.dhs.gov)
2. Contact California Governor Newsom and demand that he use his authority to stop ICE transfers from California's prisons and jails. For more information, please refer to this link - [bit.ly/HealthNotTransfers](https://bit.ly/HealthNotTransfers).
3. Call your local elected representatives/officials to express your concerns.

\* Women, includes folks who were assigned female at birth, and identify other than female including gender non-binary and gender variant.