

As highlighted in our last newsletter the situation for ICE detainees at the Bristol County House of Corrections (BCHC) has created a public safety and public health emergency. Detainees have been trying to speak up for months about the dangerous health conditions in the jail and the inability of both those imprisoned and prison staff to maintain safety from COVID-19. A class action suit was brought to the US District court in Boston in March and about 50 ICE detainees were released; however, since then it seems that no more are being freed. Currently there are approximately 80 ICE detainees in BCHC. As of June 12, 47 people detained in the prison (which houses both those in the criminal “injustice” system and those in ICE detention) have tested positive for COVID-19, and 47 staff have had COVID-19 or recently tested positive for the virus.

As many of you may know, on May 1, there was an incident of extreme violence where a number of ICE detainees were attacked by Sheriff Hodgson. What has been less well reported is that since that time--two months!--most of those in Unit B (the ICE unit where the violence took place) have been living in inhumane conditions in solitary confinement.

There are currently 2 open investigations in MA into Sheriff Hodgson’s role in the violence at the Bristol County Jail on May 1st. These investigations are being conducted by the MA Attorney General’s Civil Right’s Division, and by the MA Senate Committee on Post Audit and Oversight.

As members of Jewish Activists for Immigration Justice we have been sending information and updates, with first hand accounts of the on-going abuse, (received from organizations and attorneys with close connections to detainees and their families) to both sets of investigators. Unfortunately, no information from either investigation has yet been made public, although we are assured the investigations are actively underway.

We have also been in touch with both our federal MOCs and with our state level elected officials. State Senator Jo Comerford and Representative Mindy Domb have been especially responsive to our communications, including reaching out to Governor Baker, urging

him to use his special pandemic authority to release the ICE detainees on humanitarian parole.

We also supported a complaint that was recently filed with the MA Department of Health and the Dartmouth Health Department about the horrid health conditions in the jail, and await a response.

There was a protest in front of the jail on June 18th sponsored by Bristol County for Correctional Justice and joined by Black Lives Matter protestors, calling on Sherriff Hodgson to resign and also calling out his known affiliation with White Supremacist organizations.

In the meantime, those inside continue to suffer horrible abuse, continue to live in danger of COVID-19 and of violence by BCHC officers, as well as in danger of deportation or pressure to sign for “voluntary departure” back to the countries they fled to save their own lives and those of their families.