April 7, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

We write to express our deep concern about reports of your department’s planned deportation of Haitian migrants amid the rapidly spreading and deadly COVID-19 pandemic and to urge you to immediately halt deportations for the duration of this global health crisis.

Like many of the countries to which migrants are being deported, Haiti lacks the public health infrastructure to prevent the spread of the virus or to treat a large number of infected people. Haiti has struggled to rebuild in the aftermath of the devastating 2010 earthquake and other disasters, including a cholera epidemic. Many citizens still lack access to the most basic medical care, potable water, and soap for handwashing. It is unconscionable to repatriate migrants who may be unwitting carriers of the virus into such an environment.

We are particularly concerned about the spread of the virus among ICE detainees, given the close living conditions in detention facilities, lack of access to masks or other protective gear, and your department’s poor track record of providing adequate health care to detainees. ICE detainees and employees have already tested positive for COVID-19 and there is a high level of risk that deported migrants will act as carriers of the virus because nearly a fifth of those who contract COVID-19 are asymptomatic. At least two detainees who were in your department's custody have reportedly tested positive for COVID-19 shortly after they were deported.

Given Haiti’s ongoing challenges, including a likely surge in the number of COVID-19 infections, We urge you to immediately halt deportations and ensure that the CDC’s recommendations for preventing the spread of the novel coronavirus are implemented at every facility housing ICE detainees.
Deportations at this time would be both irresponsible and dangerous and will almost certainly place millions of people in countries with extremely basic health infrastructures at a disproportionate risk for contracting and spreading COVID-19.

Sincerely,

Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress

Karen Bass
Member of Congress

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

Val B. Demings
Member of Congress

Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Lois Frankel
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress
Andy Levin  
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Donna E. Shalala  
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James P. McGovern  
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Darren Soto  
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Gregory W. Meeks  
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Bennie G. Thompson  
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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
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Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress

Ayanna Pressley  
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
Member of Congress