**Gov. Wolf: It's Time to Shut Down Berks!**

Pennsylvania is currently home to the Berks County Family Detention Center (BCRC), one of four detention centers for immigrant families, where children as young as two-weeks-old have been incarcerated. Many of the families currently at BCRC have been unjustly held for more than a year. In August 2015, a Federal Court determined that the practice of detaining children in jail-like settings is illegal, and ordered Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to immediately release all families held in immigrant family detention centers in Texas and Pennsylvania (see [full report on federal litigation](http://www.aila.org/infonet/flores-v-reno-settlement-agreement)).  In January 2016, the PA Department of Human Services [revoked the license](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jan/29/immigration-family-detention-center-pennsylvania-shut-down-license-revoked) to operate the Berks County Family Residential Center, and that facility had been operating without a license since February 22, 2016.

On April 21, 2017 the Bureau of Appeals ruled against the PA DHS, and decided to allow BCRC to keep its license. Now, after many families spending a year in inhumane conditions, they are faced with another lengthy appeal process and extended detention.

**Governor Wolf Has the Power to Immediately Shut Down Berks. WHY WON’T HE ACT?**

In January 2017, Governor Wolf attended a rally supporting refugees at the Philadelphia airport and said "William Penn founded Pennsylvania as a safe place for vulnerable people fleeing oppression." Why won't the Governor show the families held at Berks the same compassion he showed refugee families in January?

The continued incarceration of these immigrant families and the operation of BCRC is a disgrace and a stain on our Commonwealth. However, this stain could be erased by Ted Dallas, Secretary of the PA Department of Human Services (PA DHS) and Governor Tom Wolf, who have the power to shut the doors of BCRC and pressure ICE to release these families. Unfortunately, neither Secretary Dallas nor Governor Wolf have shown to have the political will to fully pursue all means available for releasing these families and shutting the center down.

In the past two years the Shut Down Berks Coalition has repeatedly presented Secretary Dallas with information on the human rights violations taking place at BCRC and what actions he can take to protect and release these families (see Human Rights First reports from [Aug. 2015](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/family-detention-berks-county-pennsylvania) and [Feb. 2016](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/health-concerns-berks-family-detention-center)). Extensive legal research was presented directly to Secretary Dallas and Governor Wolf outlining the specific powers that PA DHS has to shut down BCRC, and yet they have refused to take action. The laundry list of abuses suffered by parents and children, children as young as two weeks old, has not been enough to spur anything more than minimal action.

This nation, this state, that speaks of liberty and justice, will only speak hollow words until the Berks County Family Detention Center and all family detention centers are closed. Now is the time for Secretary Dallas and Governor Wolf to take action. Every day BCRC is allowed to operate, is another day of legitimizing the growing movement of hate, racism, and xenophobia plaguing our country.

The [Shut Down Berks Campaign](http://paimmigrant.org/campaign-to-shut-down-berks/) is a grassroots coalition fighting to shut down the Berks County Family Detention Center and end family detention. The campaign is led by several local organizations, including [GALAEI](http://www.galaei.org/), [Juntos](http://www.vamosjuntos.org/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), [Make the Road PA](http://www.maketheroadpa.org/), [Migrant Power Movement](https://www.facebook.com/DreamActivistPennsylvania), [Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition (PICC)](http://www.paimmigrant.org/), and [Unitarian Universalist Pennsylvania Legislative Action Network (UUPLAN)](http://www.uuplan.com/) with the support of national groups: [Detention Watch Network](http://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/), [#Not1More](http://www.notonemoredeportation.com/), and [We Belong Together](http://www.webelongtogether.org/).

**What Can You Do?**

On Wednesday, April 26, spend “Wednesday with Wolf” and visit, call, and email Governor Wolf’s office to ask that he take immediate action to shut down the Berks Detention Center and free these families. Then help spread the message on social media!

**How to Contact Governor Wolf:**

Email: governor@state.pa.us

Phone:

* Harrisburg: 717-787-2500
* Northwest: 814-878-5719
* Southeast: 215-560-2640
* Southwest: 412-565-5700
* Northeast: 570-614-2090

Visit:

* Harrisburg Office: 508 Main Capitol Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120
* Northwest: 100 State Street, Suite 205, Erie, PA 16507
* Southeast: 110 N. 8th Street, Suite 505, Philadelphia, PA 19107
* Southwest: 301 5th Avenue, Piatt Place, Room 240, Pittsburgh, PA 15222
* Northeast: 2 N Main Street, Pittston, PA 18640

Fax: 717-772-8284

Twitter: @GovernorTomWolf

**Call-In Script:**

* I am calling to ask Governor Wolf to immediately issue an Emergency Removal Order of the families at the Berks Family Detention Center. Keeping families in detention is inhumane.
* Will the Governor commit to meeting with members of the Shut Down Berks Coalition on May 8th in Harrisburg to review what steps he is taking to Shut Down Berks?

**Sample Letter** - Link: http://bit.do/Wolf-ShutDownBerks

Governor Tom Wolf, I am calling on you to work with Secretary Ted Dallas and the PA DHS to immediately issue an Emergency Removal Order (ERO), which would ensure that the families at the Berks Family Detention Center are released to the care of their families & communities, and work to ensure that the Center is shut down permanently.

Pennsylvania is currently home to the Berks County Family Detention Center (BCRC), one of four detention centers for immigrant families, where children as young as two-weeks-old have been incarcerated and some families have been held for almost two years.

The continued incarceration of these immigrant families and the operation of BCRC is a disgrace and a stain on our Commonwealth. However, this stain could be erased by you and Ted Dallas, Secretary of the PA Department of Human Services (PA DHS). You have the power to shut the doors of BCRC and pressure ICE to release these families. Unfortunately, in the past year neither of you have shown to have the political will to fully pursue all means available for releasing these families and shutting the center down.

In February 2016, the PA DHS took a critical first step in protecting the children and parents being incarcerated at BCRC by deciding not to renew the state license allowing BCRC to operate. However, PA DHS failed to take the next step to fully protect these vulnerable families, and even after being presented with a laundry list of abuses, Sec. Dallas refused to issue an ERO to ensure their safety and well-being. Now, after a year of families being held in inhumane conditions, the Bureau of Appeals has issued a ruling allowing the license to stand.

The Shut Down Berks Coalition is confident that the situation at BCRC satisfies the standard of showing “gross incompetence, negligence, misconduct in operating the facility or agency, or mistreatment or abuse of clients, likely to constitute an immediate and serious danger to the life or health of the clients” required to issue an ERO.

First, according to multiple experts, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the very act of imprisoning children “puts them at greater risk for physical and mental health problems and unnecessarily exposes [them] to additional psychological trauma.” As stated earlier, many of children currently held at BCRC have been in detention for more than a year, including a two-year old child who has now been in prison for more than half of their life.

Second, the list of documented instances of abuse and neglect by the staff and administration at BCRC is long, showing that the lives and health of these families is in constant danger. These abuses have been extensively documented in legal briefs and in several reports by Human Rights First.

Will you take action today to show that you will fight to protect vulnerable families from harm?

**Sample Tweets:**

* Incarcerating children is inhumane! Why won’t @GovernorTomWolf protect the children held at Berks? It’s time to #ShutDownBerks!
* .@GovernorTomWolf says he supports refugees but hasn’t #ShutDownBerks to protect our families. Why won’t he act?
* It’s time for @GovernorTomWolf to stand up for immigrant families and #ShutDownBerks!
* .@GovernorTomWolf do you stand with immigrant communities or with Trump’s agenda of hate? Time to #ShutDownBerks!
* Jailing families is inhumane! @GovernorTomWolf stand with immigrant communities and #ShutDownBerks!
* .@GovernorTomWolf you have the power to #ShutDownBerks - issue an ERO today and help our families come home!
* It’s time to #EndFamilyDetention and #ShutDownBerks! Call @GovenorTomWolf today: 717-787-2500
* Children should be free, not in jail! @GovernorTomWolf why won’t you help #ShutDownBerks and free our families?
* .@GovernorTomWolf will you meet with #ShutDownBerks coalition May 8 and help free our families?

**Sample Facebook Posts:**

* Governor Wolf and Secretary Dallas should immediately use the full extent of their power to #ShutDownBerks and release the families by issuing an Emergency Removal Order and sending state officials to escort families out of the prison. Call the Governor today at: 717-787-2500.
* The continued incarceration of families at the Berks Family Detention Center is a disgrace! We are calling on Governor Wolf to work with Secretary Ted Dallas at the PA DHS to immediately issue an Emergency Removal Order (ERO), which would ensure that the families are released to the care of their families & communities, and work to ensure that the Center is shut down permanently. Extensive legal research was presented directly to Secretary Dallas and Governor Wolf outlining the specific powers that PA DHS has to shut down BCRC, and yet they have refused to take action and protect these children. The laundry list of abuses suffered by parents and children, children as young as two weeks old, has not been enough to spur anything more than minimal action. Call and ask the Governor to protect these families today: 717-787-2500.
* Governor Tom Wolf says he welcomes refugees and stands against Trump’s agenda of hate. Yet he has stood by silently for the past year while children as young as two years old have been held in jail, and allowed repeated human rights violations at a publicly-owned facility. Why won’t he act to protect these immigrant families? Call him and ask: 717-787-2500.