

Mr. William H. Gates, III
c/o The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
500 Fifth Avenue North
Seattle, WA 98109

Dear Mr. Gates,

We are a coalition of Gates Foundation grantees, community, faith, immigrant rights, civil rights, criminal justice reform, and labor organizations, and we demand that you divest the Gates Foundation Trust's investment in GEO Group.

Your \$2.2 million investment in GEO fundamentally contradicts your mission to “ensure that all people — especially those with the fewest resources — have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life.” GEO makes a business of jailing those with the fewest resources, profiting from their labor, stripping them of their dignity, and leaching precious human capital from already-distressed communities.

GEO Group and other private prisons have a perverse profit motive to drive criminal justice and immigration policy towards ever greater incarceration of citizens and immigrants in prisons, jails, and immigrant detention centers. GEO's core strategy is to spend millions of dollars -- dollars provided in part by investors like you -- lobbying local, state, and federal governments to institute longer sentences, to incarcerate more people for minor crimes, and to terrorize immigrant communities.

GEO Group has spent \$7.6 million on lobbying and campaign contributions in the last decade. GEO Group has also included 80% to 100% occupancy guarantees in its contracts for jails, prisons, and immigrant detention centers that incentivize the criminalization of marginalized communities and put taxpayers on the hook for guaranteeing GEO Group's profits.

Not only does GEO Group's business model depend on creating policies that put more people behind bars for longer periods of time, it also relies on cutting corners in its facilities, denying proper nutrition and rehabilitative services. GEO Group even skimps on staffing and security in its facilities, putting inmates, detainees and its own employees at risk of dehumanizing violence.

GEO Group has a long history of abuse at its facilities, and it has invested millions in lobbying and campaign contributions on issues of immigration and criminal justice policy. Accounts of sexual assault, physical abuse, medical neglect, rotten and inadequate food, forced signing of immigration papers, and death have been well-documented at GEO facilities. A federal judge called the inhumane conditions at GEO's now-closed Walnut Grove Youth Correctional Facility, “a picture of such horror as should be unrealized anywhere in the civilized world.”

We recognize the good that you do in the world, just as we recognize that earning a return on your investment is essential to your theory of change. But none of your good deeds makes financially enabling the promotion of policies that terrorize children and separate families any less harmful to America's immigrant communities.

Many of the families and communities that we represent bear the brunt of private prison corporations' preying on poor and minority communities every day. On their behalf, we call on you to act consistently with your professed mission. We urge you to immediately stop supporting an industry that profits off the exploitation of poverty and racism by our nation's broken criminal justice and immigration systems. We request a response within a week of the receipt of this letter, at which point we intend to take our concerns to the broader public.

Sincerely,

African Services Committee
Border Network for Human Rights
Casa Latina (Seattle)
El Comité Pro-Reforma Migratoria y Justicia Social (Seattle)
Detention Watch Network
Enlace
Families for Freedom
Grassroots Leadership
Human Rights Defense Center
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Presente.org
Private Corrections Institute
Responsible Endowments Coalition
Rights for All People
National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC)
Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights
In the Public Interest
Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC)
Southwest Workers Union
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA)
Council of Mexican Federations (COFEM)
Oregon Dream Activist
Colectiva Legal del Pueblo
USAS
Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC)
National People's Action