



Yakima Immigrant Response Network

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PRESS RELEASE

ICE Air Flights to Yakima – One Year Anniversary

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Today marks the one-year anniversary of ICE Air flights operating through the Yakima Airport. This is a somber reminder that ICE continues to operate within and among our community, with the machinery of deportation unchecked even by a pandemic.

The Yakima Immigrant Response Network (YIRN) began observing ICE transfers of detained persons through the Yakima Airport on May 7, 2019. This morning, we bore witness for the 62nd time. A total of 4,103 human beings have been transferred through the McCormick Air Center at the Yakima Airport by ICE. To date, at least 2,822 persons have been put on Yakima flights to be transferred to border areas for deportation, and at least 1,281 persons have been brought through Yakima to be bused to Tacoma for “ICE processing.”

While to date the Yakima City Council has refused to intervene to stop the use of the Yakima airport for the flights, many community members continue to question the use of municipal facilities to target vulnerable people and support stopping the flights through Yakima.

Even after Covid-19 cases were climbing throughout the state, YIRN witnessed that ICE was not taking health precautions seriously and was putting detainees, as well as ICE contractors and their communities, at increased risk. Only in the last two weeks have masks been worn by detainees, GEO Group bus drivers, and the iAero Airways ground crew, but there is still no way to maintain social distance based on numbers of people on the planes and buses.

While the rest of us have stopped flying because it is not safe, and communities are fully focused on mitigation to decrease the spread of Covid-19, ICE’s deportation machine continues on as if nothing has changed. Each bus/air transfer of a Covid-19 positive detainee endangers the receiving community and communities at all the points of transit.

ICE detains people who are fleeing violence and persecution and sends others to their home countries which spreads the Covid-19 that they contracted in ICE detention in the US.

Americans used to pride ourselves on spreading democracy, now we are allowing ICE to spread the Covid-19 infection to our southern neighbors, and Yakima is complicit as an actor in the detention and deportation pipeline.

Recently released research from the Center for Economic and Policy Research shows that deportation across Central and South America continues, even as increasing numbers of Covid-19 cases have been publicized in ICE detention centers, both in detainees, ICE agents, and the contractors who work in these privately owned, for-profit prisons.

<https://www.cepr.net/exporting-covid-19-ice-air-conducted-deportation-flights-to-11-lac-countries-flight-data-shows/>

We call on the City of Yakima and Yakima County to take action to protect the immigrant community from Covid-19, at ICE flights and throughout our community, businesses, and agriculture. Farmworkers and food processors are essential workers, irrespective of their immigration status. Without their health and wellbeing, Yakima will not prosper!

YIRN will continue to advocate for immigrants in Yakima County and bear witness to injustice.