

RE: Transparency and Data about Cameroonian Immigrants in Immigration Detention Centers

Dear Congressman,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and immigrant justice advocates who have been following conditions inside immigration detention centers, we respectfully seek your support in identifying crucial data from the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). We look to your leadership in bringing attention to the mass increase of Cameroonians in ICE custody.

Groups such as the Cameroon American Council have identified a rise in migration from Cameroon. Over a half a million Cameroonians have had to flee their homes due to five armed conflicts (including Boko Haram terror crisis, Seleka/Anti-Bakala rebel crisis, post-presidential electoral crisis, ethnic/religious crisis and the highly publicized Anglophone secessionist crisis of the minority English-speaking regions of Cameroon). All of these five armed conflicts are rooted in the traumatic history of slavery and colonization by the Portuguese, Germans, French and British. In response to the conflicts, the government of Cameroon has taken a strong arm approach to maintain control of the country, greatly limiting freedoms resulting in extensive human rights abuses. Of the 500,000+ Cameroonians who have fled their home as refugees from five wars, many thousands have arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border seeking asylum and a brighter future. Cameroonians are thought to be the majority of Africans at the U.S.-Mexico border and have faced and protested racial discrimination in Mexican border towns of Tapachula and Tijuana.

An unknown number of Cameroonians are now unnecessarily being held in detention by ICE. **While in detention, they have faced bias and racism** to such a degree that 40+ Cameroonian men went on hunger strike in Louisiana and 140+ Cameroonian women protested in Texas. **Detention conditions are poorly documented yet alarmingly apparent. Systemic inequity that forced Cameroonians to seek refuge also leave them vulnerable to the novel coronavirus.** In the past year, Nebane Abienwi, a Cameroonian, died at Otay Mesa Detention Center in California. This detention center has one of the highest numbers of confirmed COVID-19 cases, owing to medical neglect, overcrowding, and lack of hygiene products, which were all commonplace even before COVID19. Additionally, on Juneteenth 2020, Cameroonians led a Black Lives Matter protest inside Pine Prairie detention center in Louisiana. **Cameroonians continue to be denied their asylum requests at alarming numbers --** highlighting a complete disregard for the urgent and dangerous situation evolving in Cameroon. What is more, there is good reason to believe that other Cameroonians in other detention centers are similarly being denied their asylum requests.

We are stakeholders in the dialogue surrounding migrant detention centers. As a result, we are aware that the structures in place have all but ignored Black immigrants by failing to provide adequate legal services while detained. The lack of legal services available to black immigrants frequently results in the unlawful detention of persons indefinitely. We are invested in ensuring there is access to legal services, but have found no source of current and publicly available data about detainees, provided by ICE, with which we could identify individuals in need.

As such, we urgently request the support to congress in retrieving the necessary information about Cameroonian and other Black immigrants being detained during FY2018 to the date of this request and recently released from ICE custody in the last two fiscal years, including but not limited to:

- What is the number of Cameroonians detained
- What is the number of African nationals detained
- What is the number of Black immigrants detained
- Age
- Gender
- Medical conditions
- Language(s) spoken
- Alien Number
- The detention center where they are currently located
- Length of time in detention as of the date of this request
- Whether they arrived in detention alone or with family
- Whether they have tested positive for COVID-19 while in detention
- Whether they have a sponsor
- Whether they have legal representation?
- Whether their their representation has existed long term or temporary
- Whether they have been granted asylum ppl
- Whether they have been granted other relief
- Whether they have been denied asylum
- Whether they have been denied relief
- Whether they have asylum pending
- Whether they are receiving support from community based services

This collection of data would allow us to make a deep analysis of the support and the care needed to ensure Black Immigrants are justly represented while in detention. We look forward to working with your office to acquire this necessary data to ensure people's asylum requests are being granted. If you have any questions please reach out to Sylvie Qwasinwi Ngassa Bello at cameroon.american.council@gmail.com.

Respectfully,

Peter