Thank you for your commitment to ending detention. We have put together this editable template so that you can write to your MP and explain why you support our vision of a world free from immigration detention.

Dear (insert name of MP)

I am writing to ask you to support an end to immigration detention. The UK repeatedly affirms its commitment to human rights and so it is shameful that we allow people to be locked up without trial in detention centres and prisons. If this were to happen to a British citizen in another country, there would be righteous anger and condemnation.

1. **Detention is not necessary**

Although the Home Office repeatedly claims that detention is an essential component of the government’s immigration and asylum system, this has never been convincingly demonstrated. Detention is used far too casually. The government’s own statistics show that the majority of detainees are simply released back into the community, detention having served no purpose. The government rarely justifies the necessity of detention and doesn’t explain why alternatives to detention (such as bail with reporting restrictions or electronic monitoring) are inappropriate. We often hear ministers speak about the importance of detention in preventing people from absconding, but this is not based on evidence, as the government does not provide statistics on how many people subject to immigration control actually abscond.

1. **Detention is severely harmful**

It is difficult to understate the harm caused by detention. The detention process itself renders every individual vulnerable to harm. In his 2016 report commissioned by then Home Secretary Theresa May, former Prisons and Probation Ombudsman Stephen Shaw argued that ‘*vulnerability is intrinsic to the very fact of detention*’. Detainees experience loss of liberty, social isolation, uncertainty about their future, lack of agency and poor healthcare. Studies have consistently demonstrated the negative impact of immigration detention on mental health[[1]](#footnote-1).

The negative effects of immigration detention on detainees and their families endure long after a person is released from confinement. The Royal College of Psychiatrists has argued that “*the very fact of detention (which, unlike imprisonment, has no punitive or retributive function) mitigates against successful treatment of mental illness*”[[2]](#footnote-2). The British Medical Association recently argued[[3]](#footnote-3) that detention “*should be phased out and replaced with alternate more humane means of monitoring individuals facing removal from the UK*”. While longer periods of detention increase the risk of harm, research has demonstrated that short periods in detention can also have an adverse impact on individuals’ mental health[[4]](#footnote-4).

1. **Lack of meaningful safeguards**.

Depriving somebody of their liberty is the most coercive action that a state can take. In the criminal justice system, this is reflected in strict time limits for how long somebody can be held in custody without trial, and procedural safeguards to ensure a fair trial such as automatic access to legal aid. By contrast, the decision to detain under immigration powers is taken by a civil servant and never brought before a judge. Detainees who apply for bail do not have automatic access to legal aid. Immigration detention is an administrative not a criminal process, but those convicted of a crime can expect their right to liberty to be respected in a way that those facing immigration detention cannot.

1. **Legal aid, Windrush and the hostile environment**.

Detention is part of the ‘hostile environment’ that was established by then Home Secretary Theresa May. These policies have pushed many, including thousands of Windrush citizens, into destitution, wrongful detention, and deportation, provoking national outrage and leading to the resignation of this Home Secretary. However, the systemic causes of the Windrush scandal have not been addressed. To regain the trust of the public the Home Office urgently needs to restore legal aid for immigration cases and end immigration detention.

1. **A time limit is not enough**

All opposition parties and many campaign groups are in favour of a statutory time limit on immigration detention. This does not go far enough. For some people, even a day is irreparably damaging. Arguments about a time limit do not engage with the necessity of detention in the first place. It is possible to stop depriving people of their liberty for immigration purposes if there is the political will to do so.

1. **Cost to the public purse**

The government spends more than £160 million on Immigration detention each year. Mitie was recently awarded a 10 year contract worth £525 million for immigration enforcement services including detention and escorting. Each year, the government pays out more than £4 million to people as compensation for having been detained unlawfully. During a period when most of the public sector has faced significant cuts, such huge sums of money are simply unacceptable.

1. See: Mary Bosworth, “Appendix 5: the Mental Health Literature Survey Sub-Review” in Stephen Shaw, Report to the Home Office, “Review into the welfare in detention of vulnerable persons” (January, 2016); Guy Coffey, Ida Kaplan, Robyn Sampson, Maria Montagna, “The meaning and mental health consequences of long-term immigration detention for people seeking asylum,” Social Science & Medicine 70 (2010) 2070-2079; Pauline McLoughlin, Megan Warin, “Corrosive places, inhuman spaces: Mental health in Australian immigration detention,” Health & Place 14 (2008) 254–264; Katy Robjant, Rita Hassan; Cornelius Katona, “Mental health implications of detaining asylum seekers: systematic review, The British Journal of Psychiatry” (2009)194, 306–312; Medical Justice, “Mental Health in Immigration Detention Action Group: Initial Report 2013” (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Royal college of psychiatrists: *Position Statement on detention of people with mental disorders in Immigration Removal Centres* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. British Medical Association *Locked up, locked out: health and human rights in immigration detention* [*https://www.bma.org.uk/collective-voice/policy-and-research/ethics/health-and-human-rights-in-immigration-detention*](https://www.bma.org.uk/collective-voice/policy-and-research/ethics/health-and-human-rights-in-immigration-detention) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For instance, Cleveland and Rousseau (2013) compared the mental health of 122 detained asylum seekers with 66 non-detained asylum seekers. A greater proportion of those in detention scored above the clinical cut- off for PTSD, depression and anxiety than those in the community. The median time respondents had been in detention when they answered the questionnaire was 18 days, with 94 percent of the sample held for less than 2 months. The study indicated that even a brief period of detention adversely affected mental health outcomes (“Psychiatric symptoms associated with brief detention of adult asylum seekers in Canada,” The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry. 58(7): 409-416). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)